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LITERARY COUNTERPOINT IN THE WILD PALMS:
WILLIAM FAULKNER'S EXPERIMENT WITH
MUSICAL TECHNIQUE

by



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ABSTRACT

Chapter I examines the musical technique of counterpoint and the extension of that technique to literature. The chapter introduces a discussion of literary counterpoint in the structure, style, plot, characterization and themes of the modern novel, especially in the works of the experimental writers in the early twentieth century. The thesis suggests the presence of literary counterpoint in all of Faulkner's major novels, but establishes The Wild Palms as the only completely contrapuntal novel.

Chapter II has as its primary focus Faulkner's use of counterpoint in structure, plot, and style in The Wild Palms. The relationships between the two novellas, "Wild Palms" and "Old Man," are discussed by tracing the nature of the narrative flow of the novel from the beginning to the end of the work. Key sentences, paragraphs, symbolism, and incidents are examined in detail to illustrate the depth of the contrapuntal relationships between the novellas.

Chapter III discusses Faulkner's use of counterpoint in characterization. Faulkner intends the reader to fully understand his characters and their relationships only after they have been examined in the light of other characters. Thus, the relationship and the personalities of Harry and Charlotte can only be fully understood in the light of the relationship and the personalities of the tall convict and the woman of "Old Man."

Chapter IV discusses Faulkner's use of counterpoint in the themes of freedom and love in The Wild Palms. The distorted views of each character on these subjects are compared. The chapter seeks to achieve an understanding of the final situations of the main characters,



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especially the tall convict and Harry, and of the resolution of the novel.

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"'There aren't any morals,' Stevens said. "People just do the best they can.'"

--The Mansion, p. 429

The writing of the story is simply a matter of working up to that moment, to explain why it happened or what it caused to follow. A writer is trying to create believable people in credible moving situations in the most moving way he can. Obviously he must use as one of his tools the environment which he knows. I would say music is the easiest means in which to express, since it came first in man's experience and history. But since words are my talent, I must try to express clumsily in words what the pure music would have done better. That is, music would express better and simpler, but I prefer to use words as I prefer to read rather than listen. I prefer silence to sound, and the image produced by words occurs in silence. That is, the thunder and the music of the prose takes place in silence.

--Lion in the Garden, p. 248

CHAPTER I

ANALOGIES OF FORM: COUNTERPOINT IN MUSIC AND LITERATURE

In the experimental literature of the early twentieth century, traditions of a linear approach to style, plot, structure and theme were replaced by less restrictive techniques. Traditionally, novelists had ordered their work by an illusion of fictional time, progressing, developing, from one point at the beginning to a resolution at the end. The idea that a novel had a plot -- and that plot in turn had a beginning, and later, an end -- tended to make the novel, its characters, and its themes, dependent on the time-oriented unfolding of plot. William Faulkner is illustrative of the new generation of experimental writers who rejected the necessity of linearly developed fiction. Plot, far from being the supreme organizing principle, became a functional device no more important than the other central ingredients of fictional art: style, structure, character, and theme. The author was now free to choose where to place his stress: he could now emphasize characterization and theme and de-emphasize plot. The resultant price for such imaginative freedoms was often confusion for the reader: Faulkner preferred to sacrifice a degree of clarity in order to present the consciousnesses of his characters as part of a great flowing environment, social and natural, past and present. Time became a tool in Faulkner's work (like plot) to be used as it aided his presentation. The reader of Faulkner, therefore, must be aware of the techniques employed in his works to replace linear presentation. Faulkner's use of counterpoint in The Wild Palms, which I shall define as a

contrapuntal novel in this introduction, is the subject of this thesis. Counterpoint is present in nearly any work of literature that juxtaposes one situation, character, or theme against another. For example, George Herbert's The Temple juxtaposes randomly certain parts of the church (e.g. "Church Music") to give an overall feeling, rather than a development or progression of feeling, of the author's deep religious convictions. In the literature of the early twentieth century, contrapuntal techniques also appear. In T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, for example, the author presents three women unrelated except for the picture of sterility they each suggest to the reader. In "A Game of Chess," Eliot juxtaposes an aristocratic woman with a low-class woman:

'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
'Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
'I never know what you are thinking. Think.'

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones. 115

and

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said--
I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself, 140
Hurry up please its time
Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with that money
he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor
Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good
time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will,
I said.
Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.
Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give
me a straight look.
Hurry up please its time.

and in "The Fire Sermon" with a typist:

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
 Hardly aware of her departed lover;
 Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass; 250
 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'
 When lovely woman stoops to folly and
 Paces about her room again, alone,
 She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
 And puts a record on the gramophone.¹

The consciousnesses of the three women are unified by the sense of despair evoked for the reader. The effect Eliot achieves is to transcend particular cases of sterility, despair, and aloneness to a more universal picture of modern society, the wasteland.

In Ulysses, James Joyce's primary concerns are with the striving of man toward a goal of physical and spiritual balance of the personality, an awareness of the self, the apprehension of the meaning of human existence, and finally, his ability to communicate successfully the nature of those struggles and the meaning of life derived from them. Joyce tries to transcend the particular (the stories of Stephen and Bloom) through the juxtaposition of plot, character, structure, and theme. The early episodes of the novel seem to be an artistic quest for a mode of presentation, an attempt to touch on all levels of communication for a unified effect. The presentation may be superficial structurally, as in the mechanized, journalistic form of "Aeolus," reflecting the indifference of man through language stripped of emotion; or in the omniscient narrator sections of "Wandering Rocks," which reveals indirectly the superficial nature of such characters as Father Conmee. The presentation may rely on a more subjective structure as in "Oxen of the Sun," where the action is related through several languages and the style of different authors or even in the verbalizations of animals, or

in "Penelope," where the form relies on the reader's understanding of Joyce's interior monologue and "stream of consciousness" techniques. Or the presentation may reflect Joyce's desire to synthesize the superficial, the objective, with the more internal, the subjective realm of human experience, a fictional and symbolic synthesis found in the "Circe" episode. The structural and stylistic differences of the individual episodes, together with the juxtaposed responses of Bloom and Stephen to otherwise unrelated situations (prior to their coming together in the "Circe" episode) effectively suggests man's struggle for meaning and expression. This movement, from the depiction of separate particular episodes or story lines in fiction to the more universal meaning is aided by the author's juxtaposition of those episodes or story lines. This juxtaposition I shall define as being contrapuntal: when relationships, touching-points, between otherwise distinct units of an extended work of literature are evoked for the reader.

To the present, no clear discussion of the relationship between counterpoint in music and counterpoint in literature has been completed.² One thing is clear: the two forms are not the same. The most extensive attempt to define "literary counterpoint" is perhaps Aldous Huxley's in Point Counter Point. Huxley presents the definition through the fictitious author in the novel, Philip Quarles:

The musicalization of fiction. Not in the symbolist way, by subordinating sense to sound....But on a large scale, in the construction. The changes of moods, the abrupt transitions. (Majesty alternating with a joke, for example, in the first movement of the B flat major Quartet) More interesting still, the modulations, not merely from one key to another, but from mood to mood. A theme is stated, then developed, pushed out of shape, imperceptively deformed, until, though recognizably the same, it has become quite different. In sets of variations the process is carried a step further. Those incredible Diabelli

variations, for example. The whole range of thought and feeling, yet all in organic relation to a ridiculous little waltz tune. Get this into a novel. How? The abrupt transitions are easy enough. All you need is a sufficiency of characters and parallel, contrapuntal plots. While Jones is murdering a wife, Smith is wheeling the perambulator in the park. You alternate the themes. More interesting, the modulations and variations are also more difficult. A novelist modulates by reduplicating situations and characters. He shows several people falling in love, or dying or praying in different ways.³

For Huxley, counterpoint seemed to be an effective means of escaping the tradition of linear plot, structural, character, and theme development. As in Eliot, Joyce, and many other writers of the early twentieth century, Huxley experimented to find a more flexible approach in his work. Quarles' discussion of counterpoint is a good introduction to the techniques Faulkner was to employ later in The Wild Palms. But Huxley, unlike Faulkner, explains the technique at the expense of the work itself. Calvin Brown's criticism is well-taken: "As the novel stands it is a brilliant piece of work, but somewhat too ingenious, too much of a jeu d'esprit. The contrasts and parallelisms are cleverly managed, but the machinery is too obvious."⁴ Faulkner, on the other hand, chose to discuss his experimentation in The Wild Palms outside the context of the novel, in interviews:

To tell the story I wanted to tell, which was the one of the intern and the woman who gave up her family and husband to run off with him. To tell it like that, somehow or another I had to discover counterpoint for it, so I invented the other story, its complete antithesis, to use as counterpoint. And I did not write those two stories and then cut one into the other. I wrote them, as you read it, as the chapters. The chapter of the "Wild Palms", chapter of the "River Story", another chapter of the "Wild Palms", and then I used the counterpoint of another chapter of the "River Story." I imagine as a musician would do to compose a piece of music in which he needed a balance, a counterpoint.⁵

That's what I mean by counterpoint...that these two people had what Charlotte and Harry had given everything--respectability, future, everything--for.⁶

No, no. That was one story--the story of Charlotte Rittenmeyer and Harry Wilbourne, who sacrificed everything for love, and then lost that. I did not know it would be two separate stories until after I had started the book. When I reached the end of what is now the first section of The Wild Palms, I realized something was missing, it needed emphasis, something to lift it like counterpoint in music. So I wrote on the "Old Man" story until the "Wild Palms" story rose back to pitch. Then I stopped the "Old Man" story at what is now its first section, and took up the "Wild Palms" story until it began again to sag. Then I raised it to pitch again with another section of its antithesis, which is the story of a man who got his love and spent the rest of the book fleeing from it, even to the extent of voluntarily going back to jail, where he would be safe. They are only two stories by chance, perhaps necessity. The story is that of Charlotte and Wilbourne.⁷

Faulkner is helpful in these passages when he conceives of counterpoint in terms of antithetical balance, the alternation of chapters, the use of one chapter to stress a theme or an incident in another chapter, and the juxtaposing of parallel and opposing characters, but he also simplifies matters. To say "Old Man" is no more than the "complete antithesis" of "Wild Palms" is incorrect: the counterpoint of The Wild Palms between the two story lines is parallel and contrasting as well as antithetical. For example, the world of "Wild Palms" is chaotic and bizarre. For "Old Man" to be the "complete antithesis" of "Wild Palms," the flood, the reason for the tall convict's move from Parchman, could not possibly exist in the novel. The description of the flood in "Old Man" is balanced by the description of the chaotic city: this is parallel counterpoint.⁸ Both the tall convict and Harry are imprisoned at the beginning of the novel, but the nature of their imprisonment has significant differences: this is an example of contrasting counterpoint.

To complete the definitions of what I mean by contrapuntal technique and a contrapuntal novel, a further qualification of "literary counterpoint" is needed in terms of music. Musical counterpoint is:

simply the horizontal aspect of music. More precisely it is used to describe music in which the chief interest lies in the various strands that make up the texture, and particularly in the combination of these strands and their relationship to each other and to the texture as a whole. It is the antithesis and at the same time the complement of harmony (which concerns itself with the vertical aspect of music), at a given point and the relationship of such syntheses with others of a similar kind.⁹

and

A single part or voice added to another is often still called a 'counterpoint' to the other, but usually the word is given the general meaning of 'the combination of simultaneous voice-parts, each independent, but all conducing to a result of uniform coherent texture.'¹⁰

Musical counterpoint stresses the importance of the "combination of strands," and the "uniform coherent texture" achieved by the interaction of lines of music, or melodies. Strict contrapuntal music (e.g. the contrapuntal madrigal in renaissance music) is composed melodically, rather than harmonically. The composer is far more interested in the "various strands that make up the texture" than in the production of harmony or dissonance. Each melody in the madrigal form is independent, to the extent that it could be heard separately as a satisfactory melody, and dependent, to the extent that a listener, in hearing the melody played in isolation, might, as did Faulkner after he had written the first section of The Wild Palms, feel that "something is missing." The greatest satisfaction to be found in contrapuntal music is in hearing the melodies played together, as they were intended to be heard. Only then is the full aesthetic pleasure and surprise of fluid musical parts interacting evoked for the listener. Each part alone is suggestive of the complete musical piece, but heard separately, the listener cannot fully realize the impact of the combined melodies.

The problem of simultaneity should be considered here in brief. Calvin Brown comments: "The general basis of harmony and counterpoint -- the simultaneous presentation of two or more tones -- presents such mechanical difficulties as to be practically impossible in literature."¹¹ His point is accurate: words on top of words cannot physically exist in literature. To a large extent the use of counterpoint in The Wild Palms depends "on memory and the different possible relationships of a single word or sentence."¹² But even in music, counterpoint between melodies is not solely produced by "simultaneous presentation" of tones. In the fugue, many variations on this form of strict counterpoint occur. For example, tone-line 1 begins the piece with a short theme expressed in a single measure. The second measure introduces tone-line 2 repeating the theme played in the first measure while at the same time, tone-line 1 moves into a progression entirely different, but continuous, from the theme introduced in the first measure. Counterpoint is most obvious to the listener in the relation of the two tone-lines in the second measure. But memory is demanded to discover the counterpoint between the first measure of tone-line 1 and the first measure of tone-line 2 (the second measure of the piece). Many other examples of variations on strict musical counterpoint may be found in such forms as the fugue and the round, as well as in modern jazz. In the case of music, as well as in The Wild Palms and other examples of "literary counterpoint," the relationship of one melody to another melody, or one story line to another story line, is defined by the context into which the words and notes are placed. For example, if a tragic mood is developed in the midst of a novel or a symphony, the reader or listener's response to a

theme presented earlier in a more comic context may be modified. Thus a consideration of counterpoint in music and literature must not discount the importance of immediacy to the contrapuntal effect, but it must not demand it either.

The tone-lines of the fugue perhaps come closest, by analogy, to the technique used in Faulkner's contrapuntal novel. Ideally, the tone-lines of the fugue are all of equal interest. No one melody dominates the others (except, perhaps, in the beginning of the piece where one melody begins and the others follow suit). The melodies may be played alternately (one line may progress for several measures alone, or together with some of the other tone-lines), they may also be played simultaneously, or in combinations of alternating and simultaneous melodies.

In The Wild Palms, Faulkner alternates chapters of the respective novellas beginning with the first chapter of "Wild Palms." This would seem to indicate the dominance of the "Wild Palms" over "Old Man," but, as we shall see, the story lines of the novel are of equal interest. By "of equal interest," I mean that both novellas, like tone-lines of a fugue, are independent enough to be read separately as entities, but not so independent that the reader derives a complete understanding of either "Old Man" or "Wild Palms" read in isolation. "Wild Palms" and "Old Man" have both been published separately, a certain degree of understanding and reader satisfaction is possible; this confirms the element of independence characteristic of a story line in a contrapuntal novel. But, as in its musical counterpart, when one or the other novella is read separately, or

criticized separately, the result is often inadequate understanding of the novel: the element of dependence shared between the story lines makes it unlikely that a reader or a critic could fully understand one novella or story line without having read the other.

The treatment of The Wild Palms critically has generally evolved into a which-one-is-the-better-story approach. No critic treats The Wild Palms as a contrapuntal novel: at best, it is viewed as a novel employing contrapuntal techniques. Some critics choose to ignore counterpoint in their discussions, and those that do speak of it do not do so satisfactorily. I will briefly review a selection of criticism on Faulkner's The Wild Palms and then move to complete the definition of 'contrapuntal novel' as it is to be used in the body of this thesis.

W. T. Jewkes, limits his discussion to the plot and structure of the novel with only general passing comments and references to counterpoint in characterization and theme. He mostly ignores the examples of parallel and contrasting counterpoint, instead providing numerous examples of antithetical counterpoint.¹³ Olga Vickery's admirable discussion in The Novels of William Faulkner does not make reference to counterpoint, but substitutes instead three considerations of the story lines: the novellas as parallel, juxtaposed against one another, and taken together. Considered as parallel (similar), "each is concerned with the relationship between the individual, society, and nature, and between freedom and order;" juxtaposed (contrasted), "the two narratives obviously modify and influence and reader's interpretation of either one," for example, admiration for the convict

is qualified by "a recognition of the greater sensitivity and potentialities of the lovers in "Wild Palms;" and taken together (the overall contrapuntal effect), the stories "transcend the peculiarities of a specific time and place as described in each and depict that cyclic movement of culture which Faulkner has explored from various points of view in all his major works. The emphasis is shifted from the individual and his personal history to man and history in general."¹⁴ Thus, in his work, Faulkner consciously attempts to transcend the particular through his use of counterpoint in order that he might talk about the universal. Vickery's point is well taken. On the other hand, Michael Millgate, in William Faulkner, seems confused in his description of The Wild Palms as "the product of a rather curious technical experiment...best described as a double novel with two plots."¹⁵ He assigns significance to the novel's technical experiment only in retrospect: "looking back, we realize that there are parallels and contrasts between the two which in some degree extend and modify the meaning of both."¹⁶ The nature of Faulkner's "curious experiment," as well as that of his most mature works, implies that we must "look back" to apprehend the meaning of the work of the whole. Faulkner often "suspends" his meaning stylistically and structurally, the reader must suspend any judgements on the work until all the fictional pieces have been constructed before him. In "Faulkner's The Wild Palms: Civilization Against Nature," Melvin Backman accepts the use of counterpoint in the novel, but to differ from Jewkes' stress, Backman insists The Wild Palms "is counterpoint based less on plot structure than on theme and atmosphere; the sick modernity of 'Wild Palms' is opposed by the primitiveness of 'Old Man.'"¹⁷ But Backman is also highly

critical of Faulkner's use of counterpoint as a "mechanical," an "inartistic" device, "not introduced organically into the novel's structure."¹⁸ Although Backman is mostly wrong in his attack, he points to an important problem for the author employing counterpoint: how to make a novel work contrapuntally while at once not making his technique so obvious (as in Point Counter Point) it appears mechanical, or so obscure the work confuses the reader. In contrast to Backman, Richard P. Adams in Faulkner: Myth and Motion finds effective counterpoint not only in The Wild Palms, but also in the majority of Faulkner's mature works: Light in August, The Sound and the Fury, Absalom, Absalom!, The Hamlet, and Go Down, Moses. He defines "literary counterpoint" as "the juxtaposition or alternation of superficially unrelated matters in such a way, that esthetic tensions build up between or among them," and that "their presentation of sharply separate views, which become simultaneous in the reader's mind, makes it possible to arrange his static impressions of moving life in clusters and patterns that heighten both the motion and the stasis, an effect that would be spoiled if the parts were more smoothly articulated."¹⁹ Adams points out that characterization may also be contrapuntal, that the presentation of a single character in an instant of time may suggest not only the figure of that character, but simultaneously, other figures, either from the novel itself, or from mythological and religious archetypes.²⁰ Thus, if the reader of Light in August were to accept Joe Christmas as a Christ or anti-Christ figure, at each point of the action then, the reader would be equating (thinking simultaneously of) Christmas with his archetype:

he would be at once, Joe Christmas the fictional character, and at the same time, a Christ or anti-Christ figure. By viewing Christmas as both a character and an archetype, the reader would supposedly gain an insight as to the total impact of Christmas' part in the novel and also, perhaps, Faulkner's attitude toward the religious archetype.

The weakness of Backman's discussion of counterpoint in Faulkner's novels is that he makes no distinction between a contrapuntal novel and a novel in which contrapuntal techniques are used: the mere presence of contrapuntal devices does not make a contrapuntal novel. The uniqueness of The Wild Palms is that it is a contrapuntal novel, the only example of a novel not only employing contrapuntal devices in characterization, plot, and theme, but wholly organized structurally in terms of counterpoint. A definition at this point would probably be helpful: a contrapuntal novel employs two or more distinct (and therefore, separable) story lines, unrelated to the extent that the action may occur at different times, in different places, with different characters, but related in that the writer sets them in close juxtaposition or alternation to each other; and that the artistic devices (which in this thesis shall be discussed as contrapuntal) develop a continuous, consistent story line in each in which structure, plot, characterization, style, and theme at recognizable touching-points interact to produce antithetical, contrasting, and parallel effects which evoke to the reader a meaning which transcends that of the individual parts, or story lines.

When I say "story lines," I do not necessarily imply chronologically organized plot: a "story line" is analogous to a musical

melody or tone-line, progressing from one point to another, not necessarily limited by a linear, time-oriented, development. In The Wild Palms, for example, the "Wild Palms" story line in the first chapter of the novel is narrated from the viewpoint of a small town doctor. Time-wise, the chapter should be closer to the end of the novel. Faulkner, however, is less concerned with chronological plot than he is with the value of initially juxtaposing the consciousnesses of the doctor and Harry Wilbourne.

When I say "distinct," "separable" story lines, I imply that perhaps the method of alternating one story line with another is best. This would not have to be the case: theoretically, any novel that contains two or more story lines, however they are presented, may be a contrapuntal novel as long as the story lines could, as a test, be read separately to prove that they might exist as entities, like the story lines of The Wild Palms or any contrapuntal musical melody.

How, then, do the rest of Faulkner's novels fit into this definition of the contrapuntal novel? Although none of the novels cited by Backman seems to have been written as a contrapuntal novel, all of them employ sophisticated contrapuntal techniques. Go Down, Moses seems to be in the form of independent short stories each continuing the primary line of the novel from one story to the next. In this case, somewhat analogous to multiple counterpoint in music (constructed through the use of several melodies), the stories remain independent. Theoretically, each story should be of equal interest, and each story line should contribute to the over-all meaning of the novel as a whole. The stories of Go Down, Moses do seem to center

around common themes. Cleanth Brooks has commented that the "Old People" segment presents a descant on the "inexhaustible life of nature" which rises to "full diapason" in "The Bear."²¹ But the story lines of Go Down, Moses tend to be too independent of each other, so independent in fact that the work has problems of unity. How, for example, can the important fourth section of "The Bear" be related to "Go Down, Moses" or "Pantaloon in Black" or "Was"? And as Cleanth Brooks has suggested, why did Faulkner even bother to include "Go Down, Moses" in the novel? Go Down, Moses lacks the contrapuntal unity of The Wild Palms mostly because it, like the other works noted by Backman, was not intended to be, and was not written as, a contrapuntal novel by Faulkner. The stories which appear in the work were probably written separately. The counterpoint that exists between the story lines is the incidental result of "sharply separate views" with related thematic content.

Absalom, Absalom! is also highly contrapuntal, but the fact that Quentin and Shreve must, out of their own imaginations, construct in part the story line involving Henry, Bon, and Judith makes the latter story, by implication, dependent on the first. It then becomes difficult to separate the story lines enough to be able to read them as entities without confusion. Thus, the contrapuntal relations that develop in Absalom, Absalom! (especially between the characters) do not constitute a contrapuntal novel: the story lines are too dependent on each other for their meaning.

In The Sound and the Fury, the relationships between the "Benjy," "Quentin," "Jason," and "Dilsey" sections are highly

contrapuntal. If separated from the novel and read in isolation, the "Jason" and "Dilsey" sections read much better as entities than the "Benjy" and "Quentin" sections, which must depend on the former two sections for reader understanding.

Light in August is very close to being a contrapuntal novel, but the novel breaks down on inspection into the main story of Joe Christmas with its overwhelming negativity and the story of Lena Grove. Although the latter story line provides light relief from, and unity to, the tragic main story line, it is no more than a sub-plot, a support. The very nature of the term "sub-plot" makes it impossible for Light in August to be a contrapuntal novel. When I say "sub-plot," I mean a story line developed within a work to support another story line, rather than being "of equal interest" to it as is the case with contrapuntal story lines. On its own, read as an entity, the story of Lena Grove is rather bare in comparison to the stories of Charlotte and Harry and the tall convict. A sub-plot may very well be separable from the main story line of a work, but it suffers much more than a separated contrapuntal story line.

The Hamlet, through its viewpoint sections, juxtaposes the consciousnesses of the characters contrapuntally, but the sections themselves are interdependent with each other to the extent that they would be rather meaningless read in isolation. As I Lay Dying (not mentioned by Adams) uses viewpoint sections to juxtapose the characters, advance the action, and to present different perspectives of the same situation. Faulkner allows his characters to reveal themselves, and in so doing, an overview of the Bundren family evolves: this is contrapuntal. Yet, the viewpoint sections in As I Lay Dying are even

more interdependent than those in The Hamlet. For example, one of Vardaman's viewpoint sections consists of one sentence, "'My mother is a fish.'" In isolation, the section is almost totally meaningless, but read in concert with the other sections it reflects Vardaman's struggle to obtain a mother-figure to replace Addie.

Faulkner, in The Wild Palms, attempts to construct a unique experiment, unique among his own works as well as being unique in all of literature: a contrapuntal novel. The second chapter of this thesis will deal with his use of counterpoint in structure and plot and, with less emphasis, style. The third chapter will analyse the contrapuntal relationships that develop between Harry and Charlotte of "Wild Palms" and the tall convict and the woman of "Old Man." The final chapter will deal with Faulkner's use of counterpoint in theme, the contrapuntal relationships that evolve between the two story lines which allow the reader to make his final conclusions on the meaning of the novel as a whole.

It has been necessary, for the sake of convenience, to make divisions between Faulkner's contrapuntal technique in plot, style, structure, characterization, and theme, but it should be emphasized that the working of any novel depends on the interaction of all of these. Therefore, a certain degree of overlapping in this discussion of The Wild Palms should be expected: a discussion of characterization will be necessary to understand the structure of the novel, a discussion of plot will be necessary to understand counterpoint in theme, and so on.

CHAPTER II

COUNTERPOINT IN STRUCTURE, PLOT AND STYLE

In musical counterpoint, notes from separate tone-lines or melodies combine at certain points to produce harmony or dissonance; the interaction of the lines of music does not inhibit the flow of notes from the beginning of the piece to the end. This logic holds for the contrapuntal novel as well: the narrative flow seems directed, rather than confused, the movement from a chapter of one novella in the case of The Wild Palms to the chapter of the other does not impede the continuous nature of the novel. This chapter will explore how the elements of structure, plot, and style interact through antithetical, parallel, and contrasting counterpoint to evoke an overall meaning of the novel greater than that found in either "Wild Palms" or "Old Man" alone. Also, this chapter will discuss the means by which Faulkner not only constructs novellas that may be read as entities, but also how he is able to sustain the narrative force of the novel by alternating the story lines at key points.

The first chapter of The Wild Palms introduces the major themes to be dealt with in the two novellas. It is narrated from the perspective of the local doctor. A knocking, "at once discreet and peremptory," sounds on the doctor's door one night. He believes it has something to do with the strangers in the neighboring cottage (of which, unknown to them, he is the landlord): "It was because he had thought of nothing else for four days" (12). The action, from the instant the doctor hears the knocking to the point where he answers

the door, is suspended by Faulkner, who inserts necessary background detail. First, he comments on the character of the doctor. He

should never have been a doctor at all, who even after the six more or less metropolitan years looked out from a provincial and insulated amazement at his classmates and fellows; the lean young men swaggering in their drill jackets on which--to him--they wore the myriad anonymous faces of the probationer nurses with a ruthless and assured braggadocio like decorations, like flower trophies) he had sickened for it. So he graduated, nearer the foot of the class than the head though not at either, and came home and within the year married the wife his father had picked out for him and within four years owned the house which his father had built and assumed the practice which his father had created, losing nothing from it and adding nothing to it, and within ten years owned not only the beach house where he and his wife spent their childless summers but the adjoining property as well, which he rented to summer visitors or even parties--picnickers or fishermen. On the evening of the wedding he and his wife went to New Orleans and spent two days in a hotel room, though they never had a honeymoon. And though they had slept in the same bed for twenty-three years now they still had no children. (4)

Faulkner must enter the doctor's consciousness to give us the details of his past. The doctor, like the tall convict and Harry, would never have related them on his own. Certain details are clearly meant to stand out: it is important that the doctor be a doctor and not a mere neighbor or landlord (almost all references to him in the chapter are to "the doctor") so that the juxtaposition of his character with Harry's takes on more meaning; the passage stresses the doctor's unanswered questioning prior to becoming a full-fledged doctor (an aborted enlightenment?); the contrast of the doctor with his creative and aggressive father; the relationship of the doctor and his wife with particular emphasis on the fact that the wedding was arranged externally, and that the marriage is childless, and, by implication, sexless.

As the suspension continues, Faulkner juxtaposes the doctor and his wife with their neighbors (Charlotte and Harry). Curiosity

has driven the doctor to eavesdrop through the oleander hedge between the two cottages. He senses something is wrong with Charlotte. She sat all day in a new cheap beach chair facing the water, in a worn sweater and a pair of faded jean pants and canvas shoes, not reading, not doing anything, just sitting there in that complete immobility which the doctor (or the doctor in the Doctor) did not need the corroboration of the drawn quality of the skin and the blank inverted fixity of the apparently unseeing eyes to recognise at once--that complete immobile abstraction from which even pain and terror are absent, in which a living creature seems to listen to and even watch some one of its own flagging organs, the heart say, the secret irreparable seeping of blood.(5)

Charlotte's "complete immobility" is a reflection of the inert, meaningless relationship of the doctor and his wife. She sits passively accepting her impending death just as the doctor passively accepts a sterile relationship. The irony is, that while the doctor searches for a reason for Charlotte's "complete immobile abstraction" with vigor for four days, he does not see the reality of his own "flagging organs."

The doctor continues his struggle to understand the strange pair. He recalls his conversation with the real estate agent. The agent "'can smell a husband,'" and he does not believe Harry is married to Charlotte: "'Oh, he says they are and I dont think he is lying about her and maybe he aint even lying about himself. The trouble is, they aint married to each other, she aint married to him'" (8). But there is something odd about the man and woman, even beyond the possibility of illicitness: "'All he wants is four walls to get inside of and a door to close afterward'" (7), and she wears "'not these ladies' slacks but pants, man's pants. I mean they are too little for her in just exactly the right places any man would want to see them too little but no woman would unless she had them on

herself'" (6). Faulkner has revealed two levels of the doctor's obsessive curiosity: the trained doctor, conditioned by his medical background, who tries to reach a diagnosis of an apparent illness; and the naive, puritanical snooper drawn by the suggestion of an illicit affair. Before he reaches the door at the end of the suspension, his medical concern fades into the background: "Yes. Yes. Something which the entire race of men, males, has done to her or she believes has done to her" (13). As the suspension ends, the doctor "opened the door and peered out, bringing the torch's beam on the knocker. It was the man called Harry" (13), Faulkner has effectively compressed and given the reader the background detail necessary first, to understand in part the consciousness of the doctor, and second, to have a clue as to the nature of Charlotte and Harry's relationship.

The doctor and his "dancing" torch beam enter the night into "the full sweep of the unimpeded seawind which thrashed among the unseen palms and hissed in the harsh salt grass of the unkempt other lot" (15-16). The title of the novel should draw attention to the contrapuntal significance of "palms." Earlier, Charlotte is "apparently watching the palm fronds clashing with their wild dry bitter sound against the bright glitter of the water" (8). Faulkner ties the association of violent motion in nature to the now immobile Charlotte. Now he explains the relationship even further as the doctor questions Harry: "'Bleeding, hey?' he said. It was overcast; the invisible wind blew strong and steady among the invisible palms, from the invisible sea--a harsh steady sound full of the murmur of surf on the outside barrier islands, the spits and scars of sand bastioned with tossing and shabby pines. 'Hemorrhage?'" (16).

The "invisible" power of nature, which reflects the passion of Charlotte and Harry "invisible" to the doctor, suggests the elusive truth the doctor searches blindly for with his symbolic torch.

The reader only knows of "the man called Harry" that he is "'trying to be a painter'" (18). The irony of his statement; "'I'm no doctor'" (17), must wait until the first sentence of the third chapter for completion. The balance of the first chapter juxtaposes the urgency and impatience of "the man called Harry" with the doctor, trying to make the final "cog" click, saying "'wait.'" But as the doctor begins to realise the full meaning of the situation, he resists acknowledging the truth: "Because this was it, this the anger and outrage which would alternate with the despair tomorrow and tomorrow: Why did you have to tell me? he thought. The others didn't tell me, upset me, didn't bring here what you have brought, though I dont know what they might have taken away" (19). The doctor resists an awareness which threatens the security of his "'perennial innocence'" (16), but at the same time, he has an unrelenting desire to discover the truth about Harry and Charlotte, to confront the passion from which he has shielded himself. Harry, and the tall convict both seem to follow a similar pattern in the course of the novel: a movement from innocence (in both cases, their monastic imprisonments) to a confronting of an aspect of life from which they have been shielded.

The chapter ends with the focus on "the man called Harry," still moving about the cottage to serve Charlotte's wishes: "Just like the firewood" (22), the doctor notes. The chapter, as it stands, is a fragment: the reader expects the story line to be continued.

The second chapter, "Old Man," begins with a long paragraph that sets the present situation of the tall convict into counterpoint with that of the doctor. The doctor's existence is merely an illusion of freedom. He is not in a prison, but he is imprisoned by his monastic innocence, his decision to accept his father's practice despite the fact he "should never have been a doctor at all." He has married a woman in blind faith and obedience to his father's wishes, and because of this, the products of natural love, children, are denied him: he is impotent by default. The convict, on the other hand, is physically imprisoned, "defrauded by the third-class mail system not of crass and stupid money which he did not particularly want anyway, but of liberty and honor and pride" (24). The nature of the prison suggests an illusion of freedom: "It is a cotton plantation which the convicts work under the rifles and shotguns of guards and trusties) and muse with a kind of raging impotence" (23-24). The final chapter of the novel provides a completion to the convict's character, reveals that his impotence has been caused (as is the case with the doctor) by a decision, a mistake, concerning a relationship with a woman. His girlfriend, who shares his crude romanticism, acts as a catalyst to his desires for glory and happiness: she urges him to steal for her. Suspending this information until the final chapter provides unity to the "Old Man" novella: interest in the character of the tall convict is maintained.

Other examples of counterpoint in plot and structure begin to appear. As in the first chapter, the second chapter juxtaposes a character of central concern (Harry; the tall convict) with a lesser

character (the doctor; the plump convict): the comparison increases the reader's understanding of the main character. This structural parallel suggests that the doctor and Harry are more closely related than is indicated in the first chapter. The "ant-like lines of negroes carrying sandbags" (29), is juxtaposed to the forced labour of the convicts on the prison farm (30). The effect is to anticipate the work of the convicts in the rescue attempt -- to move the plot ahead -- ~~and to~~ also extend contrapuntally the idea begun in the first chapter: a prison can also be a state of mind. Both chapters, through the abrupt night awakenings of the doctor and the convicts, also present a plea for aid: Harry comes to the doctor on Charlotte's behalf to ask for help; the guards wake the convicts to "the sudden glare of the electric bulbs" (contrapuntal to the doctor's flashlight) and order them to the "waiting trucks" (30). The implication is that the convicts will help fight the flood.

In contrast to the point-of-view in chapter one which modulates from an external narrative (Faulkner relates the action or exposes the doctor's consciousness) to an occasional shift in the doctor's point-of-view (expressed in italics), the second chapter has only one point of view: the external narrative. Faulkner effectively counterpoints the uneven confusion and ambiguity of the doctor's mind in the first chapter against the settled quality of the narration of the second chapter which finds the convict musing, but as yet undisturbed by the flood.

Structurally, the initial paragraph of the third chapter, "Wild Palms," as well as the remainder of the chapter, succeeds first in continuing the plot from the second chapter, and second, as a logical shift from the first chapter. In the second chapter, the

convicts anticipate a possible release from prison; at the end they are "restless." By the end of the third chapter, Harry has been released from what he thinks are the confines of his internship and is in the train's drawing room about to be freed from his sexual inhibitions by Charlotte. The first sentence of the chapter, "when the man called Harry met Charlotte Rittenmeyer, he was an intern in a New Orleans hospital" (31), should have a great contrapuntal impact: the sentence confirms the contrapuntal parallel already suggested in the second chapter, Harry and the doctor are more closely connected than chapter one reveals. "The man called Harry" acts transitionally with the end of the first chapter, repeating the phrase used to describe Harry from the doctor's perspective. "Met Charlotte Rittenmeyer" is enough to stress the time shift. The two chapters of "Wild Palms" are therefore logically separated. The spatial and time gaps between the chapters of "Wild Palms" are filled by the first "Old Man" chapter. By filling the gap, Faulkner increases the dramatic impact of the word "intern" on the reader, the reason for juxtaposing the character of the doctor with that of Harry suddenly becomes much clearer. Both Harry and the doctor respond to the questioning that plagues them in the second year of their internship: the doctor chooses to finish, Harry, if not by choice, by circumstance, does not. The doctor's decision commits him to his father's practice (or at least he believes it does), Harry's decision commits him to Charlotte. This pattern in "Wild Palms," the inability of Harry and the doctor to grasp fully the meaning of freedom, to fully explore alternatives to an existence of "perennial innocence," has its contrapuntal extension in "Old Man" in the character of the convict. The doctor is not able

to conceive of a life free from the domination of his father, Harry cannot conceive of freedom except in terms of his love affair with Charlotte (at least until after her death), the convict cannot conceive of a life outside the security of his prison even when he is given the chance to be free.

As in the first chapter, Faulkner suspends the action -- Harry is about to meet Charlotte -- to introduce contrapuntal details that parallel those offered in the first chapter and anticipate others to follow. Harry's father dies from "sucking a snake bite on the hand of a child in a country cabin" (32): a charitable act intended to save a life; Charlotte also dies from poisoning ("toxemia" is mentioned both as the cause of Harry's father's death and as a possible cause of her death) due to the abortion attempt by Harry: an unnatural act intended to destroy a life. Both fathers (Harry's and the doctor's) are doctors who force their sons to follow them in their vocation. In "Old Man," in a later chapter, the convict and the woman eat tainted food but are not poisoned; the convict also cuts the baby's umbilical cord with a can (which could not have been too clean): a charitable act that saves a life. It is not unimportant that Harry goes to the party on his birthday, a strong initiation or rebirth motif is implied and will be reinforced by a contrapuntal parallel in "Old Man": the tall convict's separation from his mother-substitute (Parchman) and his journey on the Old Man towards his short-lived rebirth. In "Wild Palms," Flint (spark?) must insist that Harry come with him to the party. This is contrapuntal to the trustees who force the tall convict on his way to initiation.

As Harry and Flint stand just outside the party house, Faulkner describes the scene: "a wall of soft muted brick above which the crest of a cabbage palm exploded raggedly and from beyond which came a heavy smell of jasmine which seemed to lie visible upon the rich stagnant air already impregnated with the smell of sugar and bananas and hemp from the docks, like inert wisps of fog or even paint" (36). The image of the palm is repeated (37) and then again in a pun (40) to describe the creative force of Charlotte sculpturing, the palm of her hand. The extension of the force of "palm" from chapter one acts to qualify the image at each point of repetition: in the first chapter, the force and violence of the palm is structurally related to Charlotte, in this chapter it becomes associated with creative art (another force) as well as by association in the above passage with stagnation, impregnation, and paint.

The balance of the chapter prepares Charlotte and Harry for their affair. Harry admires "the obvious leisure and means," rather than the artistry of the painter whose picture he pauses at upon entering the house. Harry is ready for a break from the pressures of interning, and Charlotte is nearby to insure he gets it (38-39). The process Faulkner uses to have Harry and Charlotte 'fall in love' is quite simple: one day they are strangers, and two evenings later, they are in love (or more correctly, Harry thinks they are in love). In the first chapter, the fact that the doctor and his wife married without being in love is noted. The result is a sterile relationship. The two relationships of "Wild Palms" are in contrapuntal contrast with that of "Old Man": in the latter chapters of that novella, the tall convict and the pregnant woman act in the roles of man and wife,

but they are not married. They are not in love either, but stay together and cooperate not out of emotional compatibility, but out of necessity. The contrapuntal suggestion is that all the relationships of The Wild Palms are either legal, illicit, or merely natural contracts of convenience, and that love, if it comes at all, comes later.

Harry's sexual initiation at the hands of Charlotte at the end of the third chapter (60), is in direct counterpoint to the first sentence of the fourth chapter, "Old Man": "When the belated and streaming dawn broke the two convicts, along with twenty others, were in a truck" (61). The instances of parallel counterpoint include the focus of the sentence, as well as that of the chapter, on the relationship of two characters: in "Wild Palms," Charlotte and Harry; in "Old Man," the tall and the plump convicts. Faulkner calls attention to the focus in the latter case by deliberately separating them from the other convicts in the first sentence. Both sets of characters are in close quarters, moving. The most profound example of parallel counterpoint is in the description of the dawn: "belated and streaming." Most superficially, read in isolation, it is merely an act of nature that has come a little late. But the loss of Harry's virginity, to which it corresponds, is also a natural act "belated" in its occurrence, a natural force leveed up.

The resonance of details mentioned in the third chapter are extended here contrapuntally in chapter four in the imagery of cutting. Harry's cutting up of the wallet (53), the aborted attempt at passion in the hotel (46), Charlotte notes of her relationship with Rat: "'It's not finished. It will have to be cut'" (59). In this chapter, the convicts are to be separated from their existence in the prison

just as suddenly as Harry is separated from his internship and virginity: their "clanking and clashing umbilicals" are to be cut; the road disappears into the water "like a flat thin blade slipped obliquely into flesh by a delicate hand" (64). This last phrase is, of course, contrapuntal with Harry's abortion attempt: the road-knife (both man-made) "slips" into the water-flesh (both natural). The transportation of the convicts to the stricken area where their aid is needed is in contrapuntal contrast and antithesis to the journey of Harry and Charlotte. The convicts do as they are told: "Nobody told them for what nor why" (66). Both Charlotte and Harry go willingly (antithesis), but Harry is to become a prisoner of Charlotte's love design and his own illusions about the relationship. In this sense, both Harry and the convicts are taken on their journey (contrast).

The abruptness of the events in the third chapter is extended by the unpredictability of events in the fourth chapter. In the third chapter, the sudden love of Charlotte and Harry; Charlotte's abrupt manner, (e.g. after she has decided that they will have no sex in the hotel room (in itself an abrupt switch), she says "'so that's that. And no divorce'" (47)); when Harry finds the wallet, Charlotte suddenly changes her mind about giving Rat "'his turn now,'" even after telling him "'it's good-bye Harry'" (53); and in "Old Man," the shock of the flood is combined with the sudden orders and events. For example, the plump convict describes how the tall convict was "'drowned'": "'Just all of a sudden the boat whirled clean around and begun to run fast backward like it was hitched to a train and it whirled right around again'" (77-78). The plump convict grabs for a

limb and the boat is "snatched" suddenly out from under him.

The abruptness of events in chapter four is contrapuntally parallel to those in chapter three. But Faulkner qualifies the suddenness of events in this chapter first, through style, and second, by reducing any anxiety the reader might have for the convict, having him, safe and sound, relating the events back in Parchman after they have taken place. The narrative in chapter three is, as in most chapters of "Wild Palms," more abrupt and uneven than in this chapter, or in the other chapters of "Old Man." For example, Faulkner's shift from the skiff with the two convicts to the rescue boat "filled to the guard rail with homeless men and women and children" (76), and description of the people and the relief camps is more than incidental, it is contrapuntally antithetical to the abrupt presentation from "Wild Palms." Faulkner tones down any potential dramatic impact by inserting transitional detail to smooth the shift from the plump convict's "tense concern" to his telling of the story. The effect of making the "Old Man" story line simpler and less dramatic is that Faulkner directs the reader to accept "Old Man" as more obviously "entertaining" and "interesting," the meaning of the story is more directly presented. On the other hand, "Wild Palms" remains as the story line in which the more evasive meaning lies. "Old Man" does not become of secondary interest as the novel progresses, but the reader often welcomes the cut-and-dry inevitable quality of the novella which supplies a retreat from the heavy, chaotic air of "Wild Palms."

The action of the fourth chapter, the tall convict's initiation on the river, continues the narrative movement of events

from the third chapter. Harry enters what he believes to be a constructive relationship, but he does not realise its destructive potential. The river offers the convict an opportunity for a new life, but it also may threaten his life. The final sentence of the fourth chapter sounds a judgement on the freedom Harry and the convict have found: "'Yah,' the plump convict said. 'Free. He can have it'" (80). The plump convict thinks the tall convict to be dead. To the deputy, to be dead is to be free of Parchman, but to the plump convict, death is not his kind of freedom. Harry and Charlotte also have their freedom, but it is tainted and unnatural: they enjoy it at the expense of Rat and of Charlotte's daughters.

The fifth and sixth chapters concern the two types of relationships at work. In the fifth chapter, Faulkner shifts the action of "Wild Palms" from the drawing room of the train to the Chicago hotel room. The first paragraph has immediate resonance with the end of chapter four: Harry is supposedly free, but his situation now makes the reader agree with the plump convict's comment, "'he can have it.'" The relationship is different now from what Harry expected. Charlotte goes where she pleases without telling him, she rents an apartment without discussing it with him and chooses it "not to hold us but to hold love" (84). Harry still must make payments to his sister on her loan to him. He works in a lab testing for syphilis. After a time, the apartment becomes "sort of an evening club" (88) as Charlotte selects their friends. Harry has not escaped the pressure of money: his money counting ritual on the park bench (94) parallels the balancing of "his dwindling bank account against

the turned pages of his text books" back at school (32). Charlotte, too, has not escaped. Her art work, due to the pressure of money, degenerates into grotesque effigies, "a collection of little figures--deer and wolfhounds and horses and men and women, lean epicene sophisticated and bizarre, with a quality fantastic and perverse" (87).

The physical escape from the society which imprisons the characters of the novel does not guarantee freedom: the convicts are still shackled by their chains; Harry and Charlotte still keep their city-oriented, materialist value system. The change to Chicago from New Orleans does not break the sense of ritual routine Harry and Charlotte seek to escape. Harry begins to eat alone and to go to bed alone. Together, they seem to have time only to sleep, eat, and count how long their money will last. Even the move to the Wisconsin lake cabin does not break the pattern of routine. Harry thinks too much of their dwindling money-food supply. Charlotte begins to make a habit of swimming and tanning herself each day, Harry begins to feel bored and unneeded. The supposed paradise too has become routine and monotonous with "the long quiet identical days, the immaculate monotonous hierarchy of noons filled with the sun's hot honey, through which the waning year drifted in red-and-yellow retrograde of hardwood leaves sourceless and going nowhere" (111). The return to Chicago for winter leads Charlotte and Harry into a "bizarre and internal inverted life" (120). Faulkner contrasts the convict's reading of pulp fiction contrapuntally with Harry's writing of it "in one sustained frenzied agonising rush" (121), merely another substitute for

Harry's "masturbation" ritual of counting their money on his park bench. Harry cannot be satisfied with this life even though he and Charlotte are able to live decently again: it deprives him of Charlotte, and it, too, has become routine. McCord's interruptions of Harry's affected soliloquys allows Faulkner to stylistically undercut Harry's new decision (to go to Utah in the middle of winter), and to counterpoint this pattern structurally with the plump convict's interruptions in chapter six. McCord, the voice of reason, is ignored by Harry:

"Sweet Jesus," McCord said. "Holy choriated cherubim. If I am even unlucky enough to have a son, I'm going to take him to a nice clean whorehouse myself on his tenth birthday."

"So that's what happened to me," Wilbourne said. "I waited too long. What would have been two seconds at fourteen or fifteen was eight months at twenty-seven." (139)

Harry is being silly and McCord knows it:

The train moved, he leaned out, McCord moving too to keep pace with him. "That there is something in me you and she parented between you, that you are father of. Give me your blessing."

"Take my curse," McCord said. (141)

Harry is about to go into motion, the convict in the sixth chapter is in full motion: the story line between the two novellas is still continuous. Throughout his initiation, Harry has clung to his illusions about love. This becomes contrapuntal to the convict's situation:

As the short convict had testified, the tall one, when he returned to the surface, still retained what the short one called the paddle. He clung to it, not instinctively against the time when he would be back inside the boat and would need it, because for a time he did not believe he would ever regain the skiff or anything else that would support him, but because he did not have time to think about turning it loose. Things had moved too fast for him. (143)

Things move too fast for either Harry or the convict to have time to

think effectively. The difference is that for the convict thinking is unnecessary -- by a stroke of luck, he hangs onto the paddle which he must have for survival; Harry, on the other hand, should have thought rationally about his situation, but he hangs onto his misconceptions about the direction of the relationship, and he and Charlotte are doomed.

The convict's wish to return to Parchman is contrapuntally antithetical to Harry's desire to escape the society of which the hospital is a part, but ironically parallel, in that Harry has not escaped at all, he has merely fled. The river, which prevents the convict's return to his womb-like existence, and the surrounding environment is contrapuntally linked to Charlotte. The unnatural "yellow" of Charlotte's eyes is extended in the "gouts of cold yellow" of the sky and trees rushing past the convict (144); in the presence of the river at night: "The yellow flood spread on before him now with a quality almost phosphorescent" (155); and in the calm basin, "a broad peaceful yellow sea" (171). Although Charlotte is a positive force as she initiates Harry into a fuller sense of life, her link with the destructive side of nature points to (and constantly reminds us of) the negative, distorted, side of her character. The river, by contrast, seems destructive in its unnatural flood stage, but constructive in that it offers the convict an escape, a chance for a new beginning.

As Flint directs Harry to the party where he will meet Charlotte, the river directs the convict to the tree where he picks up the woman. The boredom and monotony Harry feels in the fifth chapter as he drifts into "a drowsy and fetuslike state, passive and almost un sentient in the womb of solitude and peace" (110), is directly

antithetical to the convict's situation in chapter six: immersed, forced into action, the convict must rely on his physical endurance and strength for survival. He can only dream of his peaceful, monastic life back at the prison, and only hope for a chance to surrender. The convict's frustrated contemplation of the woman's pregnancy is to have later contrapuntal significance to Charlotte's pregnancy: "He did not even hate her. When he looked upon the swelling and unmanageable body before him it seemed to him that it was not the woman at all but rather a separate demanding threatening inert yet living mass of which both he and she were equally victims" (154). Both Charlotte and Harry are to be "equally victims" of her pregnancy: Charlotte's vision of an ideal love relationship is destroyed as well as her life, Harry loses Charlotte and is imprisoned.

The plump convict's interruptions of the convict's narrative are structurally parallel to McCord's interruptions of Harry at the end of the fifth chapter. But the plump convict's insertions contrapuntally contrast with McCord's in that although they share the mildly comic mood of McCord's interruptions, they are intended not to qualify the convict's description of the events, but merely to remind the reader that those events have already taken place. McCord's interruptions are welcome relief, those of the plump convict are comic but anti-climactic.

Chapters seven and eight both are concerned with a change in the relationships: in the former, Charlotte gets pregnant, her ideal begins to disintegrate; in the latter, the convict returns to the surface of the water to accept the woman's new-born baby as an addition to his duty. Both relationships continue to change locales: the

convict moves from the Indian mound to the Cajun Village to the locale of his arrest near Parchman (with other stops in between mentioned in the final chapter of the novel); Harry and Charlotte move from Utah to Texas, from Texas to New Orleans, and finally, to the Mississippi coast. Both men must make key decisions that affect their relationships and them personally: the convict must decide between his sense of duty and the good feeling of meaningful work and freedom (and his need for security), he chooses to return to prison; Harry must choose between a relationship with a baby or without one, he chooses to perform an abortion to preserve the former relationship and fails.

The initial paragraph of chapter seven continues the story line from chapter six where the convict and the woman reach the desolate island: Charlotte and Harry arrive in desolate Utah where "neither the manager of the mine nor his wife met them" (179). The beginning of the chapter is also a sufficient break from the story line of "Wild Palms" to justify filling the spatial gap with chapter six, "Old Man": while the reader receives the details of the journey of the convict and the woman on the river, Charlotte and Harry are supposedly on their way to Utah. Thus, counterpoint exists between the narrated action of chapter six, and the assumed action of "Wild Palms" that occurs between the break.

The relationship that develops between the Buckners and Charlotte and Harry is contrapuntally parallel to that between the Cajun and the tall convict and the woman: both are unexpected arrivals, but are accepted willingly by their hosts; both the Cajun and the Buckners supply the convict and Harry and Charlotte with clothes; both the Cajun and the Buckners share shelter with the new arrivals; both

Harry and the convict perform a needed and highly appreciated service for their hosts; and, most importantly, the service Harry and the convict perform affects them personally.

Faulkner uses natural imagery, the stiff cold of Utah, to foreshadow Harry's abortion attempt (his service): "Now they had both become profoundly and ineradicably intimate with cold for the first time in their lives, a cold which left an ineffaceable and unforgettable mark somewhere on the spirit and memory like first sex experience or the experience of taking human life" (182). The convict does not need to be told to do the best he can in the bayou by the Cajun; this is contrapuntally contrasted by Buck, who must try to convince Charlotte and Harry to accept the cold: "'The thing is, to make up your mind you will always be a little cold even in bed and just go on about your business and after a while you will get used to it and forget it and then you won't even notice you are cold because you will have forgotten what being warm was ever like'" (183-184). This passage is also contrapuntally parallel to the convict's endurance of the wave: "He went on, driving the skiff with muscles which had been too tired so long they had quit feeling it, as when a man has had bad luck for so long that he ceases to believe it is even bad, let alone luck" (170). Charlotte and Harry believe that a heightened state of excitement, of passion, can be preserved in a true love relationship, that it can be "'all honeymoon,'" but the above passage contrapuntally points out the contradiction in their philosophy: all extremes, whether of motion and excitement (like an existence isolated from society), or of weather (the chaos of the flood, the cold of Utah), endured over a period of time will lose the sense of extremeness.

If you are constantly cold, being cold becomes routine; if you are constantly battling a wave, bad luck seems to become routine; if you constantly flee from society, the act of fleeing eventually becomes unexciting and routine.

The cold forces Charlotte and Harry and the Buckners to share the same bed for warmth. The fact that Charlotte has inhibitions is reflected by her unwillingness to make love with Harry under those conditions and is juxtaposed against the Buckner's complete lack of inhibition:

There would come the ruthless stallion crash with no word spoken, as if they had been drawn violently and savagely to one another out of pure slumber like steel and magnet, the fierce breathing, the panting and shuddering womanmoans, and Charlotte saying, "Can't you all do that without pulling the covers loose?" and still it was not for them. (193)

Charlotte's philosophy of sexual freedom is qualified, contradicted, by her actions. Harry, too, contradicts himself. At the end of chapter five, he says "'I am vulnerable in neither money nor respectability now'" (140), but this is qualified by his conversation with Charlotte over Buck's offer of money for the abortion attempt:

"And you said no," she said. "Why? Was it the hundred dollars?"
 "You know better than that. It was a hundred and fifty, incidentally." (191).

The fact that Harry has still not overcome his obsession with money is reflected in his later actions. After he has refused cash payment from Buck, he accepts the commissary key from him, saying "'it will keep the books balanced'" (195). This is a parallel to his ritual of balancing the pages of his text books against his bank account. When the Poles finally leave the mining camp, Harry is ready to take possession of the supplies left in the commissary:

"Thank God we got our grub out first."
 "Maybe it wasn't ours," she said soberly.
 "Buckner's then. They hadn't paid him either."
 "But he ran away. They didn't." (203)

Charlotte's objections do not prevent Harry from taking the food when they leave and later selling it. This is contrapuntally antithetical to the convict's refusal to take more than his share of the worth of their alligator catch. He refuses even to take the Cajun's spare paddle after the Cajun has left the camp in the face of the flood.

There are several other examples of counterpoint in plot and structure between the two chapters. Both Harry and the convict come in contact with a strange breed of people with whom they must communicate: when the Poles threaten Harry, Charlotte puts her art to good use by drawing an explanation (200-201); on the other hand, the convict is never faced with a problem of communication he cannot overcome. He and the Cajun live and do business together, all without understanding each other's language. The contrapuntal implication of this comparison is that even though Charlotte and Harry make drastic changes in locale, they do not attempt to adapt to their specific environment or the people in it unless absolutely necessary. The isolation they seek prevents them from being open to people unlike themselves; for the convict, openness is natural. The honesty of the convict and the Cajun is contrapuntally parallel to the "hunkies" (Poles), who "'don't understand dishonesty'" (188). This innate honesty is antithetical to Charlotte, who lies both to her husband and to Harry, from whom she conceals the full nature of her emotional needs. Harry is also dishonest: he lies about being a full-fledged doctor to Buck (185), and sells the food (209). The influence of

Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is evident in the convict's philosophy about lying:

And how he did not; he could not have expressed this either, it was too deep, too ingrained; he had never yet had to think it into words through all the long generations of himself--his hillman's sober and jealous respect not for truth but for the power, the strength, of lying--not to be niggard with lying but rather to use it with respect and even care, delicate quick and strong, like a fine and fatal blade. (276)

The conceit of lying as a "fine and fatal blade," lying as a tool to be used with extreme care, is contrapuntally antithetical to Harry's lack of care, his use of the knife for the abortion. The convict, even though the woman suggests that he lie, will not use his "fatal blade;" Harry does.

The greenness of Charlotte's eyes, their return to a more natural color; Harry's unselfish gesture in his concern for her warmth (197); the manner in which they make love after the Buckners have left (not as mechanical as before); are the first indications of a shared love between them. Ironically, that is the night Harry gets her pregnant. Charlotte's insistence that he abort the baby causes him to despair: he seeks aid from a madam of a whorehouse who does not understand his intent to get an abortionist (this is contrapuntally parallel to the convict's misunderstood attempts to surrender, e.g. pages 168-169), and then, he buys pills "that might have been coffee beans" (214). The failure of the abortion causes Harry and Charlotte to return to New Orleans, where Harry, once again on his park bench, constructs the conversation between Rat and Charlotte in his mind. Charlotte wants to see her children and make Rat promise to help Harry. The chapter ends with Charlotte and Harry on their way to the Mississippi coast with "the scaling palm trunks" fleeing

"constantly past" (228). Charlotte tries to convince Harry to escape, but he insists he will "hold" her: this is antithetical to the convict's desire to be rid of the woman.

The first sentence of chapter eight indicates the convict, during the spatial gap filled by chapter seven, has returned to the surface, any thought of suicide has apparently left his mind. The woman's new-born baby, like Charlotte's daughters, is all right: the transition between the two chapters is smooth. There is antithetical counterpoint between the fact that the woman accepts her baby and Charlotte rejecting having a baby and leaving her children.

The mention of "knife" in the first sentence is one of Faulkner's best examples of antithetical counterpoint in the novel. If chapter eight is read apart from the context of "Wild Palms," "knife" will seem of little importance. But read after chapter seven, "knife" takes on contrapuntal significance: Harry uses a knife to save a relationship by killing life; the convict is asked if he has a knife with which to help save a life. He gets a can to cut the umbilical cord if only to insure that there will be no further delays to his surrendering of himself and the woman. He must rely on the woman to think of the can, and as he tries to think of something to do, "he felt the same outrageous affronting of a condition purely moral, the same raging impotence to find any answer to it" (229). This is a brilliant piece of parallel counterpoint. First, it is consistent with the "Old Man" story line: the convict is merely feeling again his moral impotence as he confronts the woman. But, more importantly, his feeling is directly contrapuntal to Harry's sense of suffocation, e.g. p. 207. The convict's use of the can brings up the question of what makes a

doctor. Harry is nearly one, but he fails at an "easy" operation; the convict is not a doctor, but he succeeds.

Other problems which could have been potentially tragic for the convict and the woman and her baby are handled by the tall convict, in contrast to Harry, without hesitation. He provides the woman with food and hot water. He is able to maintain self-control even in the face of his obsession with snakes. This is antithetically contrapuntal to Harry's loss of self-control: for example, he walks into a doctor's office to offer to perform abortions (219).

In a single chapter, Faulkner simultaneously shows the natural compatibility of the convict, the Cajun, and their natural environment, and contrasts their relationship with that of Charlotte and Harry, and that of the Buckners:

Within the furious embrace of flowing mare earth and stallion sun, divining through pure rapport of kind for kind, hill-billy and bayou-rat, the two one and identical because of the same grudging dispensation and niggard fate of hard and unceasing travail not to gain future security, a balance in the bank or even in a buried soda can for slothful and easy old age, but just permission to endure and endure to buy air to feel and sun to drink for each's little while. (255-256)

Charlotte and Harry search for freedom, but do not obtain it; the convict resists freedom, and backs into an ideal life in the Cajun village. Like so many Faulknerian characters, the convict accepts that part of living with nature is an ethical striving against it. Thus, he kills alligators armed only with a knife.

The "cosmic joker" will not allow the convict to remain in the bayou: the levee is dynamited. But instead of looking for an alternative to his existence in the Cajun village, the convict assumes this to be a signal for his prompt return to Parchman. Although he stops to work at various points along the way, he does so only to

supply himself with "enough" money to reach the prison (with the important exception of his last job that he is forced to leave for getting into "'trouble'" with someone's wife).

Chapters nine and ten move the story line of The Wild Palms to full diapason: both stories return to the chronological position of the opening chapters and both chapters elaborate on the situations presented in the early chapters. Charlotte dies, and Harry must choose between life and death; the convict's "free" life comes to an end, the woman merely disappears. Both Harry and the convict receive sentences for outrages "'...against the peace and dignity of the State of Mississippi'"(317), but they are apparently unconcerned about the workings of "justice." They think about their dead relationships: Harry tries to piece together the meaning of his relationship with Charlotte; the convict, who has already forgotten the woman, recalls the girlfriend for whose love he went to prison.

The initial paragraph of chapter nine continues the story line of the novel: Harry, like the convict, is about to be taken into custody. The convict wants to surrender, but the deputy, comically enough, must fumble for his gun to arrest him; the doctor assumes Harry will try to escape and also brandishes a gun. Harry accuses the "black steady wind" of "'interfering'": "This time as before he and the black steady wind were like two creatures trying to use the same entrance. Only it dont really want to come in, he thought. Dont need to. Dont have to. It's just interfering for the fun, the hell of it." (281). The passage is contrapuntally parallel to the convict accusing the "cosmic joker" (264-265). Even Harry's thoughts seem to correspond to almost the exact dialect the convict might have used. Faulkner

counterpoints the convict and Harry by choosing inexact grammatic phrases Harry has never been guilty of: "'it dont,'" "'dont need,'" "'dont have.'" Harry believes the wind is laughing at him, and he hears "risible" and "chuckling" sounds. This reinforces the contrapuntal parallel of the wind in "Wild Palms," and the "cosmic joker" of "Old Man."

In the face of Charlotte's death, Harry seems to gain strength:

He could not stop it, each breath shallower and harder and harder and nearer and nearer the top of his lungs until in a moment it would escape the lungs altogether and there would indeed be no breath left anywhere forever...thinking. Steady now. Careful now. When she comes back this time she will have to begin to hold on. (283-284)

Harry rejects thoughts of suicide. Faulkner juxtaposes his struggle with himself in his effort to keep Charlotte alive, and the battling of the doctor and his wife. Harry tells Charlotte "'you've got to hurt. That's what you've got to hold on to.'" Now it must have been laughing; it couldn't have been anything else" (285). The laughing of the wind stresses the irony of Charlotte having "'to hurt...to hold on.'" One of her reasons for not wanting the baby was that "'they hurt too much. Too damned much'" (217): to avoid the pain of responsibility, Charlotte chooses to abort only to find herself in physical pain because of the abortion. In contrapuntal contrast to this is the situation of the woman of "Old Man," who, too, must "'hold on! Just hold on!'" (176), in order to have her baby safe on land. Charlotte's bleeding is contrapuntal to that of the convict in his fight on the boat:

his nostrils gushing again, the mild man stooping over him with behind the thin rimless glasses the coldest eyes the convict had ever seen--eyes which the convict said were not looking at him but at the gushing

blood with nothing in the world in them but complete impersonal interest.

"Good man," the mild man said. "Plenty of life in the old carcass yet, eh? Plenty of good red blood too. Anyone ever suggest to you that you were hemophilic?" (242)

and, later: "This time he choked and spat a gout of blood, his nose had no more feeling than a toenail" (243). This is contrapuntally linked to Charlotte's understanding of the nature of the operation:

"We have proof it is, that it's nothing, no more than clipping an ingrowing toenail" (206). The "impersonal interest" of this doctor is extended to the doctor of chapters one and nine, who is far more concerned that Harry must suffer for playing doctor, than he is about Charlotte's health. His wife is quite accurate when she says:

"Suffer fiddlesticks," the wife said. 'You're mad because he used a scalpel without having a diploma. Or did something with it the Medical Association said he mustn't'" (290). But then she begins to act like the woman on the boat in chapter six of "Old Man" (167), concerned more about respectability than helping someone: "'Put that thing down and give her whatever it is so she can get out of that bed. Then give them some money and call a taxi-cab, not an ambulance. Give him some of my money if you want your own'" (290).

Harry's journey has been cyclic, a circular one: he returns to the hospital, where Charlotte dies. A perverse comment by one of the police officers gives "knife" some added Freudian connotations: "'You played hell, didn't you. Using a knife. I'm old fashioned; the old way still suits me. I don't want variety'" (299). The hospital now becomes a real prison where Harry is held. He does not regret having left

the carbolised vacuums of linoleum and rubber soles like wombs into which human beings fled before something of suffering but mostly of

terror, to surrender in little monastic cells all the burden of lust and desire and pride, even that of functional independence, to become as embryos for a time yet retaining still a little of the old incorrigible earthy corruption. (299)

Harry's vision now brings his former life as an intern into counterpoint against the "womb-like existence" the convict has virtually returned to in Parchman. Harry seems to be rejecting one type of prison only to be condemned to suffer in another. Charlotte has tried to make him promise to run, Rat offers him money and later, poison. But Harry does not run this time. At the end of the "Wild Palms" novella, he says, "Yes, he thought, between grief and nothing I will take grief" (324). Conclusions about Harry's final decision will be discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

The initial paragraph of chapter ten moves the story line along to the penitentiary where Harry and the convict (ten years apart) end up. The convict becomes a political problem: he has been ruled dead, and hence, free. The governor's emissary notes: "'Your man could have saved all this if he had just gone on and drowned himself, as he seems to have led everyone to believe he had. But he didn't. And the Chief says do'" (330). The warden's sense of justice yields to the injustice dictated to him by the governor to avoid political embarrassment. The convict has responded to his strong natural sense of duty by returning the woman, the skiff, his clothes, and himself, to the prison. Instead of honour which he deserves, he receives ten extra years. To the plump convict's statement, "'Ten more years to do without a woman...'" the tall convict only replies "'Women ---t!'" (339).

This chapter of the thesis has illustrated how Faulkner

employed counterpoint in plot, structure, and style to juxtapose the story lines of "Wild Palms" and "Old Man." The story lines remain independent in terms of content (the plots are not repeated), but dependent in terms of situation: what happens in each novella, the prime stress Faulkner wishes the reader to recognise, is often paralleled, contrasted, or opposed by what happens in the other novella. The situations, and the responses of the characters to those situations, are contrapuntal: they influence the reader's understanding and conclusions about The Wild Palms as they become "simultaneous" in his mind. Structure and style are the means by which Faulkner achieves the juxtaposition of situation, and thus, the contrapuntal effect. Alternation of the chapters at key logical points, beginning new chapters with highly-charged opening sentences, are used to achieve the greatest level of contrapuntal effect. The repetition of key phrases and words from one novella to the other also aids Faulkner's intent, the phrases and words gain new meaning from a later change in context, e.g. "the man called Harry;" "palm;" "knife." The final two chapters of the thesis will extend the discussion first to characterization, and then to the use of counterpoint in theme.

CHAPTER III

COUNTERPOINT IN CHARACTERIZATION

Characters in one story line that are fully developed, yet, that still rely in part on the actions and consciousnesses of characters in another story line for more complete reader understanding: these are contrapuntally defined characters. Faulkner in The Wild Palms, presents his characters as composite personalities responding to, and being affected by, their environment, both social and natural. By "composite" personality, I mean the total framework, emotional and moral, cognitive and unconscious, of the character's mind; the sum result of his conditioning by society, both in his past and in the present: the complete state of being of a character which includes his various conflicts and tendencies. By "environment, both social and natural," I refer to the natural surroundings ('Nature'), and the people and institutions which comprise societies. Faulkner's approach to personality agrees with that of the humanistic psychologists: personality is a dynamic process, the result of environmental conditioning, past and present: the way in which people react to a situation is largely dependent on how they have reacted to past situations and how those experiences affected them. Faulkner extends this to characterization. For example, the tall convict resists leaving his womb-like prison because he has been hurt by a woman in the outside world: his past experience affects his desires and actions in the present. In The Wild Palms, Faulkner juxtaposes the conflicts of individual characters to portray a more universal view of the condition of man as well as to shed light on the individual characters.

The contrapuntal effect is achieved by subjecting each character (that he wishes to juxtapose) to similar stimuli from their respective environments and comparing their responses (actions) to those stimuli. As in structure, plot, and style, counterpoint in characterization may be contrasting, parallel, or antithetical, depending on how the characters are allowed to respond.

Faulkner prepares the reader for the present action of the novel by supplying the details of past experiences that will incline the main characters to make certain decisions. With the exception of the woman in "Old Man," all the characters of the novel are somehow distorted by their past experiences. The tall convict is a hill-man. The conditioning of his 'primitive' society makes it difficult for him to deal with the complexities of a modern urban society: his rigid code of honour, pride, honesty, and especially duty is "queer;" qualities not reinforced in urban society. The convict, like the Poles at the Utah mining operation who cannot understand dishonesty, is thus victimized by the people of a society he feels he has no reason to distrust: "The Diamond Dicks and Jesse Jameses and such--whom he believed had led him into his present predicament through their own ignorance and gullibility regarding the medium in which they dealt and took money for" (23). Of course, the pulp paperback writers are not the ignorant and gullible ones: the tall convict, due to his immaturity of mind, is. In a point contrapuntally parallel to Harry's character, it is evident that the convict is victimized by his inexperience in love. He tries to steal money, not out of greed, but for a dream of happiness in a love relationship he is unprepared for. The tall convict is victimized by his inability to communicate

with the representatives of urban "justice." Although he is not an idiot, he seems to have the same problem in this situation as does Benjy in The Sound and the Fury: he does not know "how to say," how to tell the court his motivations. He can only have faith in the "rules."

Yet, although the convict's hill society does not prepare him for contact with the urban society, it does condition him for his encounter with his natural environment. Unhampered by the so-called 'needs' of the urban society (money, meals three times a day, shelter, etc.) the convict wastes little time or effort worrying about the lack of them in the chaos of the flood. He merely endures and does the best he can.

In his relations with other people, the convict is prepared by the rigid roles of his hill society. Few ambiguities exist in the relationships between men and women. It is accepted that men are better prepared by their aggressive nature to deal physically with the environment. Women are content to depend on them and accept a passive, supportive role. The attitudes toward sex are also less complex in application. The convict never expresses any moral qualms or feelings of guilt over his seduction of the "negress...straggler" in prison (335), or of another man's wife (334). The implication of these incidents is they were less a case of rape than of mutual consent: the role of sex has a more natural position in the context of the convict's world than it does in the urban society of Charlotte and Harry. Nevertheless, the convict has been irreparably soured by his experience with his first girlfriend. This is to have a profound impact on the limits of his relationship with the pregnant woman: his mistake seems

to have deprived him of any future hope of a spiritually and physically complete love relationship.

The woman of "Old Man" is a typical Faulknerian earth-mother. She has the same calm accepting air, the same virtually instinctual knowledge and ability to endure characteristic of other (more completely drawn) Faulkner women like Lena Grove and Eula Varner. She is the only major character in The Wild Palms that has no visible conflicts. She, like the convict, has been raised close to nature: she is a hill-woman. Very little more of her is known. She seems aware of her environment (social and natural) and her role in relation to it. She has learned to have faith in the ability of men to deal with a threatening situation: there is, therefore, no question in her mind that the convict should take the more aggressive, directing, role during the flood, even though he is not her husband. She willingly accepts her natural role in the creative process of carrying, giving birth to, and caring for, her baby. There is no question in her mind of her place, where she belongs, and she seems secure in the knowledge that eventually she will return home.

Charlotte Rittenmeyer is very much the rebellious woman of her time. Faulkner implies the reasons, the basis, for her discontent early in the novel:

They stood in the court beside the jasmine bush. "I've got two children, both girls," she said. "That's funny, because all my family were brothers except me. I liked my oldest brother best but you cant sleep with your brother and he and Rat roomed together in school so I married Rat and now I've got two girls, and when I was seven years old I fell into the fireplace, my brother and I were fighting, and that's the scar." (40)

Faulkner uses style to show Charlotte's close identification with her brothers: Charlotte is distorted by incestual tendencies. This is

implicit in the second sentence of the passage, four stressed references to her brother appear as compared to one unstressed reference to her marriage to Rat. As is the case in her affair with Harry, her marriage could have been to "any man" since her brother is denied her. The incest taboo prohibits her from gaining a chance to have a more complete love relationship with her brother, so she must find a substitute. As Harry is to note later: "'It's not me you believe in, put trust in; it's love'" (83). Charlotte marries Rat simply because he is convenient, he is her brother's roommate. She puts faith in the norms of society and in love to make the relationship work. This is in contrapuntal contrast to the type of faith the woman in "Old Man" has, a pragmatic faith based on necessity and the aggression of men. Charlotte's faith is more fallible. It must depend on the sharing of her distorted conception of love by Rat and later, Harry: she depends on marriage and then an affair to make up for her disappointment with her brother. But a conventional marriage, with its culturally-defined roles, husband-aggressive-independent / wife-submissive-dependent, does not fit Charlotte's aggressive and independent personality: marriage inevitably must disappoint her. Her identification with her brothers causes her to acquire her 'masculine' approach (a clue in the passage above is that she fights seriously with her brother) to life and interpersonal relations. It is not, therefore surprising that she should be so inclined to rebel against the norms of a society that prevents her from attaining her ideal relationship and later disappoints and frustrates her attempts to find a substitute relationship. It is Charlotte's inability to resolve the conflicts in her personality that contributes significantly to her tragedy. Faulkner stresses this

through antithetical counterpoint: Charlotte's rebellion and tragedy is opposed by the acceptance and ultimate endurance of the woman in "Old Man."

Harry, like Charlotte, is victim of an urban society and its pressure for conformity: "(not sin, he thought. I dont believe in sin. It's getting out of timing. You are born in anonymous lockstep with the teeming anonymous myriads of your time and generation; you get out of step once, falter once, and you are trampled to death)" (54). Harry is conditioned by a sterile urban society that emphasizes not the human needs for love, friendship, closeness to nature, and meaningful communication, but rather, wasteland values: materialism, a need for respectability and a drive for status, and the consequent dishonesty, selfishness, and hypocrisy that arises from an obsessive desire to gratify these 'needs.' These negative 'needs' are extended contrapuntally in "Old Man" to characters like the "mild" doctor on the rescue steamer (239-250), the woman on the boat (167), and the governor's emissary who all reflect the dehumanizing effect of the "bizarre" and distorted urban society. They are contrapuntally parallel to characters in "Wild Palms" like the middleaged doctor, his wife, and the owner of the Utah mine.

When Harry's father dies, Harry accepts without question the direction of his future outlined for him in his father's will: "I here bequeath and set aside the sum of two thousand dollars, to be used for the furthering and completing of his college course and the acquiring of his degree and license to practice in Surgery and Medicine, believing that the aforesaid sum will be amply sufficient for that purpose" (32). He, like the doctor in chapter one, has been directed

by an ambitious, successful father who cannot conceive of a life for his son any different than his own. As a result, Harry becomes incapable of making his own decisions, he is swayed by the influence of an aggressive personality. He cannot imagine any vocation other than medicine. Although he is brought up, as an orphan, by his half sister who "was married to a man who died still a clerk in a grocery store in a small Oklahoma town" (32), Harry does not see any possible alternative in the small town to what he believes to be his destiny. When he completes medical school and is faced with the choice of returning to the town or going on to New Orleans to "assume his internship...he chose New Orleans. Or rather, there was no choice" (33). Once he enters the hospital, Harry, like the convict in prison, leads a secure, monastic existence isolated from the responsibilities and pressures of a relationship with a woman. Four months from completing his internship, Harry feels the same uneasiness the doctor in the first chapter represses:

He seemed to see them: the empty years in which his youth had vanished --the years for wild oats and daring, for the passionate tragic ephemeral loves of adolescence, the girl- and boy-white, the wild importunate fumbling flesh, which had not been for him; lying, so he thought, not exactly with pride and certainly not with the resignation which he believed, but rather with that peace with which a middleaged eunuch might look back upon the dead time before his alteration, at the fading and (at last) edgeless shapes which now inhabited only the memory and not the flesh. (34)

Harry's musing is in contrapuntal contrast to that of the convict:

Harry looks out from his hospital-prison through memory and regrets what he thinks he has missed; the convict recalls from memory what he has experienced, and for that reason does not regret his imprisonment. Harry's mind works in a more natural direction (towards the affair) because he has been deprived; the convict's mind works in an unnatural direction, towards his acceptance of a meaningless existence, because

he has been exposed.

Because the woman of "Old Man" has no conflicts, she is equipped to endure her pregnancy, her extended isolation with the convict, and the flood. Because Charlotte, Harry, and the tall convict have been distorted by their past experiences, they are ill-equipped to meet the problems Faulkner subjects them to, especially when they are subjected to a situation that directly demands action from an area of their personality plagued by conflict. For example, the convict is equipped by the conditioning of his hill society to cope with the challenge of the flood. Immediate action is demanded, and the convict responds: he has no gun, therefore, when he and the woman need food, he steals a killed rabbit from a hawk with an "intolerant omnivorous yellow eye" (231); when the woman asks for hot water, he improvises with "a match-box contrived by telescoping two shotgun shells" and gathers some dry wood (230); to make a paddle for the skiff, he nurses "little constant cunning flames along the flanks of the log to make it paddle-shaped" (235); when money becomes necessary, he works with the Cajun, or runs a shovel plow (333), or even gambles to win "enough exactly" for their passage fare (336). On the other hand, Harry and Charlotte are ill-equipped to deal with the natural environment. They fail to see that it is possible to live on less than three meals a day, or without money, or without canned food, or without (at least from time to time) a constant source of income. At the lake cottage, Charlotte swims and Harry cuts wood and sleeps, until he thinks "I am bored. I am bored to extinction. There is nothing here that I am needed for. Not even by her. I have already cut enough wood to last until Christmas and there is nothing else for me to do" (112). Harry

is also perceptive enough to think of the absurdity of "how man alone of all creatures deliberately atrophies his natural senses and that only at the expense of others; how the four-legged animal gains all its information through smelling and seeing and hearing and distrusts all else while the two-legged one believes only what it reads" (105). But he is incapable of translating thought into action. There are, in fact, things for him to do: he could at least have tried his luck at fishing. The tin cans should not have confounded him, worried him. He should never have accepted as true that they were incontrovertibly a measure of "how many days they had left." He comes to a partial awareness of this late in the novel, as he contemplates a man and a woman living in "the concrete hull of one of the emergency ships built in 1918 and never finished":

The sun was setting behind it now and he could not distinguish much, but the next morning he discovered the projecting slant of the stove pipe with smoke coming out of it and he could distinguish the color of the garments flapping in the morning sea-wind and watched later a tiny figure he knew to be a woman taking the garments from the line, believing he could distinguish the gesture with which she put the clothes pins one by one into her mouth, and he thought, If we had known it we could probably have lived there for the four days and saved ten dollars. (314)

The man (who fishes for food) and the woman in their makeshift existence are contrapuntally parallel to the convict and the woman: both carry on a life of solitude in the natural environment not dependent on city-oriented 'needs' that confound Harry and Charlotte.

The convict is also well-equipped to meet the demands of his relationship with the woman. Communications between them are never confused: each knows exactly where he stands. They are both working towards a similar goal, to be free of the flood danger and to return to their former lives. The relationship is not complicated by sexual

and role conflicts. Because there is no conflict between them, the convict and the woman move smoothly from the point at which they meet to the point at which they depart. Contrapuntally antithetical to this is the confusion of roles and the lack of communication in Charlotte and Harry's relationship. Harry's passivity is extended throughout most of the affair, he is incapable of functioning in the conventional role of a husband. Nevertheless, he tries to assert himself: the norms of his society incline him to try to be a husband:

"I had turned into a husband," he said. "That was all. I didn't even know it until the store had offered to keep her on. At first I used to watch myself, rehearse myself each time so I would be sure to say 'my wife' or 'Mrs Wilbourne', then I discovered I had been watching myself for months to keep from saying it; I have even caught myself twice since we came back from the lake thinking 'I want my wife to have the best' exactly like any husband." (132)

But by trying to assume the role of the husband, Harry denies the reality, the limits of the relationship. Harry and Charlotte are lovers, not man and wife. There is no hope for marriage: Rat is a Catholic and will not grant a divorce. It is much easier for Harry to attempt to become a husband and resist the illicit overtones of the affair that plague him, than to accept an identity as a lover. McCord is sensitive to Harry's conflicts when he tells him "'Yah, you're a hell of a guy. You haven't even got the courage of your fornications, have you?'" (101). Charlotte is content to "'live in sin'" (83), but Harry insists on projecting his own drive to make the affair more palatable, more respectable, on her:

It's not the romance of illicit love which draws them, not the passionate idea of two damned and doomed and isolated forever against the world and God and the irrevocable which draws men; it's because the idea of illicit love is a challenge to them, because they have an irresistable desire (and an unshakable belief that they can, as they all believe they can successfully conduct a boarding house) take the illicit love and make it respectable. (82)

Unsure of his role, Harry is often insecure and dissatisfied with the relationship and resentful towards Charlotte, but fails to communicate his dissatisfaction to Charlotte except through meaningless anger.

Only the reader is aware of his anxious moments. For example:

She doesn't love me now, he thought. She doesn't love anything now. (59)

There's a part of her that doesn't love anybody, anything; and then, a profound and silent lightningclap--a white glare--ratiocination, instinct, he did not know which: Why, she's alone. Not lonely, alone. She had a father and then four brothers exactly like him and then she married a man exactly like the four brothers and so she never even had a room of her own in all her life and so she has lived all her life in complete solitude and she doesn't even know it as a child who has never tasted cake doesn't know what cake is. (82)

Complete communication is more important to Charlotte and Harry's relationship than it is to the convict and the woman who are able to operate almost non-verbally. In contrapuntal contrast to the situation in "Old Man," Charlotte and Harry's ideas about love and their roles are so drastically different, they often work against each other rather than for the good of the relationship. The convict's inner conflicts (e.g. his obsession with snakes, his clinging to the symbols of the prison) do not endanger the goals of his relationship with the woman: they still return safely. Charlotte and Harry contract for a sexual and spiritual relationship. Two dimensions are thus added to their relationship which are not present to complicate things between the convict and the woman.

Charlotte fails to learn from her experience with Rat: she puts her faith in love once and is disappointed, but she does so again with Harry. She believes that outside a conventional system of roles (i.e. marriage) she can assert herself and realise her ideal love relationship. She believes she can take Harry like a piece of clay

and mold him with her palm -- as if he were a statue -- into the companion she wants. She is not inclined to follow the woman-submissive-dependent pattern of the woman in "Old Man." It is her aggressiveness that pulls Harry into the affair at the outset with a "grasp simple ruthless and firm, drawing him after her" (39). It is she, not him, who assumes the dominant role: she seduces him and defines when and where the seduction takes place (60); she selects their apartment (80); she chooses their friends (88); and she earns money. She asserts herself aggressively, and defends her right to do so openly to Harry:

She came and put her arms around him, hard, striking her body against him hard, not in caress but exactly as she would grasp him by the hair to wake him up from sleep. "That's what I'm going to do. Try to do. I like bitching, and making things with my hands. I dont think that's too much to be permitted to like, to want to have and keep." (88)

Yet, despite her masculine air, Charlotte is still a woman, and, like the woman, dependent ultimately on a companion capable of immediate action. Faulkner implies her femininity on several occasions. She is not without love for Rat as a husband: she asks to speak to him before Harry and she leave on the train (58); and she tells Harry that Rat was a successful husband (116). She has a degree of motherly love for her children: she is concerned enough to want to visit them before her death. Harry's comment "'they were both well?'" (228) emphasizes her primary reason for going home. She cries twice: in response to Harry's romantic gesture to pay her cab fare home "'with what you intended to take your other shirt out of the laundry with and get nothing for that either but the privilege of transporting my damned ass'" (50), and after he gets the job as the W. P. A. school-crossing guard (220). Charlotte also becomes "profoundly feminine" when she can no longer handle the outside world. When Harry threatens

to send her back to Rat, she can only plead:

"No!" she cried. "No! No! Jesus God, no! Hold me! Hold me hard, Harry! This is what it's for, what it all was for, what we were paying for: so we could be together, sleep together every night: not just to eat and evacuate and sleep warm so we can get up and eat and evacuate in order to sleep warm again! Hold me! Hold me hard!" (118-119)

Or in Utah, when Harry moves to get her "undergarment where she had flung it away onto the floor...at once she clutched him. 'Where are you going?' He told her. She clutched him, hard. 'When I get cold, you can always cover me'" (197), she seems insecure. Or when her puppet business collapses, she decides to stay home and cook:

She had chops and such, she prepared the meal in a curiously frivolous apron new too like the chintz on the table; he thought how failure, reacting upon her like on a man by investing her with sort of dignified humility, had yet brought out in her a quality not only female, but profoundly feminine. They ate, then she cleared the table. He offered to help but she refused. (93)

Charlotte finds Harry incapable of immediate action when her pregnancy intrudes: this is antithetically contrapuntal to the convict, who acts almost immediately when the woman asks for aid. A stroke of nature forces her back into her natural dependent state, but Harry is still caught in his unnatural role, molded into passivity. As he does not have the courage of his fornications, he is also frozen in fear at the idea of performing an abortion on the person he loves. In antithesis to the convict and the woman who accept the dictates of nature and endure, Charlotte and Harry challenge nature, their relationship (along with Charlotte's life) is dissolved.

Faulkner successfully juxtaposes the characters of The Wild Palms. Harry, Charlotte, and the tall convict and the woman are distinct individuals, but their actions and thoughts contrapuntally affect

the reader's understanding and judgement of the novel as a whole: the responses of the individual characters are juxtaposed to give a more profound insight into the nature of man. The final chapter of this thesis will use the details concerning counterpoint in plot, structure, style, and characterization, applying them to the themes of freedom and love as a basis for the final conclusions about the novel.

CHAPTER IV

COUNTERPOINT IN THEME

Thematic counterpoint is the device by which separate treatments of theme in the story lines are juxtaposed. As in structure, plot, style, and characterization, a theme in one story line may be reinforced by the use of parallel, contrasting, and antithetical counterpoint in another story line. Although well-defined themes may appear meaningful read in vacuo in say, "Wild Palms," the conclusions the reader draws from the stressed theme are never so clear as when the story lines are read together, in concert. As in music, a theme is sounded along one melody or tone-line, then stressed with its appearance later in another melody or tone-line. How the theme is treated as the piece progresses, the context in which it is played, serves to form the reader's perception of, and conclusions about, that theme. In music, as in literature, theme becomes most important, most completely developed, in its resolution at the end of the piece. In literature, especially in such early twentieth century writers as Faulkner, the reader must suspend judgement, the tendency toward premature conclusions, until all the 'facts' of the novel have been presented, until the last view of the theme has been used.

The contrapuntal experiment of The Wild Palms tends to temper the reader's inclination to impose his own conceptions about love and freedom on the characters of the novel. Many examples of different attitudes toward love and freedom are held in the novel: the meaning of the themes is interpreted and expressed in many ways. The suggestion is that the reader should not accept any one interpretation as true, but

consider each view in the light of the other attitudes to be found. Only then is the diapason of The Wild Palms realised, the full contrapuntal effect -- interaction of theme with structure, style, plot, and characterization -- perceived and conceptualized by the reader.

Only the woman of "Old Man" has no conflicts over the meaning of love and freedom. In the context of the novel, love means responsibility for her: she enjoys (presumably) physical love with a man, and a baby, which she must love and care for, is the product of that relationship. Love may also mean, perhaps, to live with, trust, obey, and support a man, but Faulkner is not concerned with this dimension of the woman's character. She exists primarily to show that some form of love can endure, is possible and meaningful to at least one person in the midst of the chaos.

To the woman, freedom also means responsibility. When she accepts her baby, she limits her freedom. When she enters into a relationship of convenience, of companionship, with the tall convict, she must give up a degree of her freedom of movement, of independence of mind. But to the woman, a sacrifice of some of her freedom is completely natural. To her, the acceptance of the womanly role also means the guarantee of a certain degree of security: had she acted "like a bitch," similarly to Charlotte, the convict might very well have let her drown. To endure then, is the woman's central motivation. Love and freedom are luxuries she partakes of as they come, but never to the extreme that they hinder or threaten her ability to endure.

To Charlotte, in contrapuntal antithesis to the woman, the ability to endure is secondary to her ideal concept of love and

freedom. It is not whether you continue to exist that is most important to Charlotte, it is how you exist, how you endure. When Charlotte mentioned to Harry, "'I liked my oldest brother the best but you cant sleep with your brother'" (40) she alluded to her most satisfactory love relationship up to that point. The nature of Charlotte's personality, the aggressiveness and independence conditioned by growing up in a family of males, fits more into an egalitarian direction than into the conventional womanly role. But although Charlotte may have desired an incestual love relationship, she decides to yield to her societal conditioning which says "'you cant sleep with your brother.'" She puts her faith in society's accepted channel for love, the institution of marriage, and expects to be satisfied with a man merely physically close to her brother. She does not see being in love as a pre-condition to marrying Rat any more than a pre-condition to living with Harry: she is most interested in being able to assert her aggressiveness and independence. The conventional roles of marriage conflict with her design, she must, therefore, resolve to put her faith not in society and love, but just in love: the unconventional relationship she has with Harry is similar to the one she might have had with her brother had that earlier prospect been possible. Her decision is a difficult one: she must somehow rationalize leaving a husband and children that love her. It is easy enough to abandon Rat as an object for contempt (59), but she is on much shakier ground when she talks about her daughters:

" I wasn't thinking of them. I mean, I have already thought of them. So now I dont need to think of them any more because I know the answer to that and I know I cant change that answer and I dont think I can change me because the second time I ever saw you I learned what I had read in books but I never had actually believed: that love and

suffering are the same thing and that the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and any time you get it cheap you have cheated yourself. So I dont need to think about the children. I settled that a long time ago. I was thinking about money." (48)

Charlotte suffers for "'the value of love,'" but she is at least partly wrong when she says she has "'already thought'" about her children. She thinks only of what their absence will do to her (she might lose their love), not of what her absence will do to them: her children must suffer for the luxury of Charlotte's affair. It is important that Charlotte says "'love and suffering are the same thing.'" She associates all love with the incestual desire she has valued most highly: all rewarding love relationships must then, like the violation of a societal taboo, condemn the participants to suffer, "two damned and doomed and isolated forever against the world and God" (82). The story line of "Old Man" stresses the weakness in Charlotte's argument contrapuntally suggesting her selfishness and lack of responsibility toward her children and husband: the woman is concerned first about her baby and second about herself.

It is simply wrong to believe Charlotte was in love with Harry in the initial stages of the affair. Harry realises "'it's not me you believe in, put trust in; it's love...not just me; any man'" (83), and Charlotte says "'Yes.'" But Harry is not quite right when he says "'any man.'" Charlotte has selected him, if not because she loves him, for what he is. She has learned from her experience with Rat that she needs a man who will not prevent her from asserting herself. She perceives Harry's vulnerability: he can be controlled and molded. An affair with him would closely resemble her incestual model. Harry would become her companion and lover; the affair would be illicit, so they would have to "'suffer;" and because marriage is

impossible, Charlotte has no reason to fear being forced back into the role of a wife. Above all, she believes the affair can maintain a steady level of passion and excitement: "'Listen: it's got to be all honeymoon, always. Forever and ever, until one of us dies. It cant be anything else. Either heaven or hell: no comfortable safe purgatory between for you and me to wait in until good behavior or forbearance or shame or repentance overtakes us'" (83). The contradiction in Charlotte's logic is stressed contrapuntally by the parallel in "Old Man" discussed earlier: no extreme of passion, or in the convict's case, no extreme of bad luck can last indefinitely without becoming unexciting or "no luck at all." Therefore, Charlotte is unrealistic in insisting that their relationship "'be all honeymoon,'" because after a while, even honeymoons become boring (their interlude at the lake in Wisconsin proves that). Part of Charlotte's problem with love is not accepting the possibility of compromise. Like the convict's sense of duty, her code is rigid: "'They say love dies between two people. That's wrong. It doesn't die. It just leaves you, goes away, if you are not good enough, worthy enough. It doesn't die; you're the one that dies. It's like the ocean: if you're no good, if you begin to make a bad smell in it, it just spews you up somewhere to die'" (83). Charlotte points to the dynamic side of love. Meaningful love must be striven for like meaning in life; if people do not prove themselves worthy, they make a bad smell and die. The convict and the woman, as they fight against the river and survive in isolation, prove themselves worthy of life. Charlotte's design, however, does not help her when something arises that her ideal has not accounted for: her pregnancy. She has had too much faith in abstractions. In explaining why she is

pregnant to Harry she says "'maybe I was mixed up with incest'" (204), and

I should have known better. I always did take it easy. Too easy. I remember somebody telling me once, I was young then, that when people loved, hard, really loved each other, they didn't have children, the seed got burned up in the love, the passion. Maybe I believed it. Wanted to believe it because I didn't have a douche bag any more. Or maybe I just hoped. Anyway, it's done." (205)

Charlotte has forgotten her own words "'any time you get it cheap..." (48), and has taken it "'too easy.'" Both she and the convict take it too easy, they put faith in the wrong things at the wrong times: the convict trusts pulp books and goes to jail; Charlotte trusts an equally doubtful source and gets pregnant. She denies the possibility of pregnancy because, "'mixed up with incest,'" she really wants to believe she cannot become pregnant: it is irreconcilably opposed to her love ideal.

The idea of being pregnant (a symbol of the destruction of her ideal) is as repugnant to Charlotte as is the woman's pregnancy to the convict. She moves to defend her threatened design:

"We can't help it. It's not us now. That's why: dont you see? I want it to be us again, quick, quick. We have so little time. In twenty years I cant any more and in fifty years we'll both be dead. So hurry. Hurry." (210)

"I told you once how I believed it isn't love that dies, it's the man and the woman, something in the man and the woman that dies, doesn't deserve the chance any more to love. And look at us now. We have the child, only we both know we cant have it, cant afford to have it. And they hurt too bad, Harry. Too damned bad. I'm going to hold you to the promise, Harry. And so from now until that day comes, we won't even have to mention it, think about it again. Kiss me." After a moment he leaned to her. Not touching otherwise, they kissed, as brother and sister might. (218-219)

Charlotte does not realise that by her own definition, something in her has died, she is now not worthy of love. By leaving her husband and children to live with Harry, she abdicates her responsibilities as a

mother and a wife, but further, by choosing to abort her baby, she denies a natural product of physical love, children. Her excuses, they "'cant afford to have it,'" and "'they hurt too bad,'" are plausible enough if "Wild Palms" is read alone, but in concert with "Old Man," they are contrapuntally antithetical to what the woman does in similar circumstances. Charlotte's excuses suffer in the contrapuntal comparison. The woman has little problem in adapting to the fact of her pregnancy, she merely accepts the motherly role dictated by her societal conditioning and her natural inclinations. But Charlotte cannot afford to have the baby (she thinks) or even to stay pregnant and give it up once it is born: it would mean the shattering of her last hope of attaining her selfish ideal. If the relationship is merely between her and Harry, she can perpetuate her companion-aggressive-dominant role, but if a baby intercedes -- even a pregnancy -- Charlotte believes she must fall back into the role of mother-dependent. Harry will no longer be a brother-figure, but a father: she believes she will be no better off with him at that point than with Rat, perhaps worse. The failure of the abortion means much more than death to Charlotte: it is the final disappointment, the irrevocable frustration of her ideal hope. It is, then, no wonder that in chapter one the doctor senses "Yes. Yes. Something which the entire race of men, males, has done to her or she believes has done to her" (13). Her incestual inclination is frustrated; Rat disappoints her in marriage, frustrating her faith in legally sanctioned love; Harry, too, has failed her in her final hope in illicit love. That Harry has come to be on an equal basis with Rat in her eyes is implied twice when, delirious, she confuses them:

"Let me go, you bloody bungling bastard" (it was "rat," the noun, which the doctor believed he heard). "You promised, rat. That was all I asked and you promised. Because listen, rat--" the doctor could hear it, the voice cunning, secret now: "It wasn't him, you see. Not that bastard Wilbourne. I ratted off on him like I did you. It was the other one." (21)

and later, when she talks to Harry:

"All right. I'm holding on. But you musn't hold him. That was all I asked. It wasn't him. Listen, Francis--See, I called you Francis. If I were lying to you do you think I would call you Francis instead of Rat?--Listen Francis. It was the other one. Not that Wilbourne bastard. Do you think I would let that bloody bungling bastard that never even finished hospital poke around in me with a knife--" (288)

The irony of these passages is that Charlotte is in confession (note the second passage is the last thing she says before her death) and no one can possibly comprehend her meaning. She attempts to expose her secret-self, as does Addie to the reader of As I Lay Dying, to show she has made a final distinction between Harry, "'the bloody bungling bastard,'" Rat, and the abstracted Harry, the "'other one,'" the brother figure on whom she has imposed her love ideal. The confession is meant to excuse Harry, "'the bloody bungling bastard,'" because she has "'ratted off on him'" like she did on Rat: she has not exposed her secret-self to either of them. That she is alone is partially realised by Harry, although he can never guess the reason why:

And then, a profound and silent lightningclap--a white glare--ratiocination, instinct, he did not know which: Why, she's alone. Not lonely, alone. She had a father and then four brothers exactly like him and then she married a man exactly like the four brothers and so she probably never even had a room of her own in all her life and so she has lived all her life in complete solitude and she doesn't even know it as a child who has never tasted cake doesn't know what cake is. (82)

Harry does not see the logical progression from Charlotte's father to her brothers "exactly like him," to Rat, who is "exactly like the four brothers," to himself: to Charlotte, he, any man she would ever decide

to "love," would be exactly like her father, exactly like her brothers.

Charlotte's distorted conception of love inhibits her ability to love in any meaningful sense of the word. Freedom to Charlotte could only mean freedom to love in the bizarre fashion she idealizes. Disappointed, frustrated in life by the failure of that ideal, she must also be disappointed in death: she lives life "in complete solitude," and now she must also meet death alone. As an end to frustration and suffering, Charlotte welcomes death.

Both Charlotte and the convict are imprisoned by their distorted views about love. In this way, their situations are contrapuntally parallel. The convict, like Charlotte, is disappointed in an immature "love" relationship in his youth, and, also like her, his faith in the justice of the urban society has been shaken (note Charlotte's comment on page 226). The convict has a romantic view of love which he retains even when its impregnability has been questioned, the train robbery aborted, even when he must go to prison for punishment: "And who to say what Helen, what living Garbo, he had not dreamed of rescuing from what craggy pinnacle or dragoned keep when he and his companion embarked in the skiff" (149). The convict still clings to his cinema, paperback-inspired dream. His girlfriend, the reader is told, was little different: "He could not have phrased this either: that who to know what Capone's uncandled bridehood she might not have dreamed to be her destiny and fate, what fast cars filled with authentic colored glass and machine guns, running traffic lights" (338). His rigid code, his sense of honour, pride, and duty, do not allow him to consider his release on the river as an offer of escape, of freedom: "His own character...his good name, his

responsibility not only toward those who were responsible toward him but to himself, his own honor in the doing of what was asked of him, his pride in being able to do it, no matter what it was" (166).

Instead, with his romantic dream in mind, he sets out to find the woman. The river does not even allow him the romantic rescue part: the woman discovers him, aids him, before he discovers her. This, together with her pregnancy, again shatters his hopes for excitement in the world outside his prison: "And this is what I get. This out of all the female meat that walks, is what I have to be caught in a runaway boat with" (149-150). The convict must first insure their safety, "his desire now not to go anywhere, reach any destination, but just to keep the skiff from beating itself to fragments against the tree trunks" (151), and then he is free to bemoan his situation: "And this is all. This is what severed me violently from all I ever knew and did not wish to leave and cast me upon a medium I was born to fear, to fetch up at last in a place I never saw before and where I do not even know where I am" (231). The tall convict is not talking simply of his life at Parchman here. He could not mean his life in prison was "all I ever knew and did not wish to leave." What he does mean is that his life before birth was more satisfying than any condition he has found himself in since: he was secure, not threatened by relationships with women that disappoint him, and not subject to a society of pulp writers and men with shotguns that deceive and misunderstand him. He wishes to return to an unattainable state; this is contrapuntally parallel to Charlotte's desire to return to a brother-sister relationship: the convict and Charlotte both must seek a substitute. For Charlotte, it is an illicit relationship; for the tall

convict, it is a monastic prison existence. Thus, when the convict is obsessed with his vision of the woman who, "incontrovertible and apparently inescapable" "had ceased to be a human being and...had become instead one single inert monstrous sentient womb from which, he now believed, if he could only turn his gaze from pausing again at the spot it had occupied, would not return" (162-163). It is because she reminds him of the state he can no longer attain: pre-natal bliss. Not that he does not try: he dives into the river "feet first and face down back into that medium...from which he himself had never completely emerged" (177), as if in an attempt to regain the state from which, at that very instant, the woman's baby is being delivered.

The convict cannot, therefore, bring himself to try to have a physical love relationship with the woman. It would be contrary to the responsibility-free, insulated existence he is now inclined to prefer. The baby becomes a symbol of that state of secure isolation, the womb, that he associates with the prison, the woman's pregnant condition cannot be erased from his mind: "The tall convict had thought of that. He remembered it: how there were times, seconds, at first when if it had not been for the baby he might have, might have tried. But they were just seconds because in the next instant his whole being would seem to flee the very idea in a kind of savage and horrified revulsion" (335).

The convict prefers to return to his death-like existence in Parchman than to suffer disappointment and frustration outside in life. In comparison to women, his mule seems more dependable:

(they had let him name it--John Henry) which no man save he had plowed for five years now and whose ways and habits he knew and respected and who knew his ways and habits so well that each of them could

anticipate the other's very movements and intentions; it was himself and the mule, the little gobbling faces flying before them, the familiar hard skull-bones shocking against his fists, his voice shouting, "Come on, John Henry! Plow them down! Gobble them down, boy!" even as the bright hot red wave turned back. (241)

Faulkner's choice of the name "John Henry" was not accidental: John Henry (according to the legend) was a Black; the convict's cry, "'plow them down! Gobble them down, boy!'" is contrapuntal to Charlotte's words just before the destructive abortion: "'It's all right. We know how. What was it you told me nigger women say? Ride me down, Harry'" (221). Faulkner has already hinted something more about the relationship between the convict and John Henry:

One night and he was in bed, in his bed in the bunkhouse and it was cold, he was trying to pull the covers up only his mule wouldn't let him, prodding and bumping heavily at him, trying to get into the narrow bed with him and now the bed was cold too and wet and he was trying to get out only the mule would not let him, holding him by his belt in its teeth, jerking and bumping him back into the cold wet bed. (236)

The relationship between the man and his mule has, in the tall convict's dream as well as in his dazed state during the fight on the boat, taken on a bizarre quality contrapuntal to Charlotte's secret ideal love relationship. Charlotte takes a conventional brother-sister companionship and adds sexual, incestual connotations to it; the convict takes a normal working, companionship with his mule and unconsciously adds sexual, bestial connotations to it. Both Charlotte and the convict wish to return to the distorted relationships; both embrace a distorted view of love in place of one they cannot attain.

When the convict is returned to his cell in the prison with the additional ten year sentence, he is once again secure to say "'Women ---t!'" (339). It is difficult for the reader to accept his decision reading "Old Man" in isolation, but in counterpoint with

"Wild Palms," the convict's resignation is nearly unbearable. Nevertheless, his decision is necessary in order to raise the resolution of "Wild Palms," Harry's final awareness, to diapason. The convict can conceive of freedom and love only as something threatening to his security, a frustration and disappointment best forgotten. He does not realise that during his brief interlude of freedom outside the confines of Parchman he has fought a flood, taken responsibility for a woman and her baby as a husband might do, furnishing them with food and protection; he has done meaningful work, not fruitless toil; he has gambled successfully; he has seduced a woman; he has even been able to give up the symbols of his prison existence, the painter (the grapevine rope of the skiff), the skiff, and his prison clothes with little anxiety. The convict was 'free,' but he did not realise it. Even though he says "'Yes I reckon I had done forgot how good making money was. Being let to make it'" (262), like Harry in his decision to go immediately into his internship, the convict does not realise he has a choice: "He would have to move on soon, thinking (the convict), All this durn foolishness will stop soon and I can get on back, and then he suddenly found that he was thinking, Will have to get on back" (261).

The convict and the woman form a working relationship of convenience: both strive for the same goals. Harry and Charlotte, too, form a relationship of convenience although Harry is less aware of it than Charlotte. Harry, similar to the convict, in his sudden exposure to the world outside of textbooks, is vulnerable. Both are victimized: the convict steals, Harry consents to have an affair with a woman he hardly knows.

It is clear that Harry never understands Charlotte completely, never understands her reasons for wanting the affair. He tries to sort things out to McCord: "'She's a better gentleman than I am, too... Because crows and sparrows get shot out of trees or drowned by floods or killed by hurricanes and fires, but not hawks. And maybe I can be the consort of a falcon, even if I am a sparrow'" (141). Harry's comparison of Charlotte to a hawk is contrapuntally extended in "Old Man" to the hawk with "the intolerant omnivorous yellow eye" (231), from which the convict takes the rabbit for food. But Harry is wrong in his assessment of relationships in nature as well as between himself and Charlotte: it is almost comic to picture a sparrow as the consort of a falcon. Harry is on shaky ground when he claims his credentials for doom:

"I am vulnerable in neither money nor respectability now and so They will have to find something else to force us to conform to the pattern of human life which has evolved to do without love--to conform, or die...So I am afraid. Because They are smart, shrewd, They will have to be; if They were to let us beat Them, it would be like unchecked murder and robbery. Of course we cant beat Them; we are doomed of course; that's why I am afraid." (140)

But it is Harry who tries to make the affair respectable, not Charlotte, by trying to assume the role of husband; Harry, who is obsessed with money; Harry, who fails to insist that Charlotte go to the hospital when she is dependent on him. Harry seems to revel in thoughts of doom, no less perhaps, than the convict's girlfriend revels in her dream of exciting crime. Although he says he is afraid, he still elects to go to Utah, even after McCord questions his decision: he tries to test his ability (as sparrow) to determine the direction in which the falcon will fly, and also, he tries to steer them into, directly against, the flood to insure that he is no longer vulnerable. This contrasts

contrapuntally with an incident in "Old Man," in which the convict has just been refused an opportunity to surrender. Faulkner comments: "he paddling again now, violently, as a man hurries toward the precipice for which he knows at last he is doomed" (169). The convict raises and shakes his paddle and screams in defiance against Them (the people in the boat), but rather than paddle willingly into the flood, he tries to stay ahead of it by moving in the same direction it is going. Harry takes the unnatural course of action: if he is right in saying that those that get out of step once "are trampled to death," he need not go to so much trouble to get trampled. Harry's decision to go to Utah is not one prompted by blind love, but by foolish selfishness. Harry knows that in Utah Charlotte will not be able to work. That fact, he hopes, will put him in charge of the relationship: at last, the illicit affair will have become a comfortable (legal) doctor-husband, and wife-of-doctor relationship. His plans are quickly defeated. Billie, like the agent in the first chapter, can tell illicit couples, and Buck easily detects ^{that} Harry is not a full-fledged doctor. Nevertheless, it is in Utah, just after Buck and Billie have left, that Charlotte and Harry come closest to an unselfish love:

They didn't get up to prepare or eat supper. After a time they slept; Wilbourne waked somewhere in the rigid night to find the stove had gone out and the room freezing cold. He thought of Charlotte's undergarment where she had flung it away onto the floor; she would need it, she should have it on now. But it too would be like iron ice and he thought for a while about getting up and fetching it into the bed and thawing it, warming it beneath his body until she could put it on and at last he found will power to begin to move but at once she clutched him. "Where are you going?" He told her. She clutched him, hard. "When I get cold, you can always cover me." (197)

Charlotte and Harry, in their pursuit of exciting, passionate love, have missed the point: after the excitement and the passion diffuse,

after even illicitness has come to be routine, lasting love comes out of insignificant, unselfish gestures like the one in the passage above. The tragedy of the "story of Charlotte and Harry," is not found in their battle with society; in the end, the tragedy of their affair is that they never share love, never meet, communicate, love, on a common ground.

If The Wild Palms is not affirmative, it is not completely negative either: the final conclusions about the novel depend on the interpretation of Harry's final situation. Obvious pressures make the mood pessimistic: Charlotte's death, the failure of the affair, Harry's imprisonment, his final physical solitude, and contrapuntally, the convict's return to prison and, supposedly, his relinquishing of any life outside his secure cell, and his rejection of women. Other pressures tend to make a totally pessimistic judgement of the novel at least dubious: Harry's final resolution to endure, his intention to perpetuate Charlotte's memory, the extent to which Harry has changed from the beginning of the novel to this point, and contrapuntally, the elevation of Harry's final state of being as contrasted by that of the tall convict.

The affair of Charlotte and Harry was "doomed" from the beginning: we know this from chapter one, "Wild Palms," from the legal limits set in chapter three (no possibility of divorce), and from the contrapuntal relationship of Harry and the convict. In chapter one, it is clear that Charlotte is close to death; in chapter three, Faulkner reveals the nature of Harry's monastic existence. In chapter four, it is clear that the convict, also leading a monastic existence, will be returned to Parchman despite anything that intervenes in the

course of his story. Faulkner also links the two stories by giving the reader a clue to the final resolutions (this is more obvious in "Old Man"): the course of the events in the novel must then, the reader should be aware, lead up to the two situations initially presented to us, the convict back in prison with a story to tell in "Old Man;" Harry seeking help for Charlotte in "Wild Palms." The fact that Faulkner gives the reader the complete resolution of the convict's story and withholds information about the story of Harry and Charlotte tends to stress the importance of the latter story to the final conclusions about the novel.

The contrapuntal interplay, as well as the details, of the initial chapters of the novel establish Harry as the central figure of interest. Harry is the only primary figure of the novel whose fate is not completely resolved until the end of the novel. The counterpoint of "Old Man" and "Wild Palms" implies he will probably end up in some kind of prison. But as the novel points out, there are many potential prisons. Harry's fate has many possibilities: he might end up as a free man, but imprisoned by his feelings of guilt; he might choose to kill himself; he might return to his internship; or, more simply, he might just go to prison. What is most important though, is what Harry will be like, what he will be thinking, in prison. Faulkner withholds this information about the convict also (the reader is not told of the final absurd scene with the warden, nor the convict's reaction to his unjust treatment until the final chapter of the novel). This contrapuntal parallel tends to stress the state of mind, rather than the situation, of Harry and the tall convict. It is, therefore, more important to try to understand the thoughts of the convict and Harry,

not why they got into a certain situation, but what they were thinking as they were caught and held. The convict's consciousness at the end of the novel can easily be summed up: he has chosen security and safety over memory (freedom of his imagination) and women. The fact that Harry's consciousness, on the other hand, cannot be so easily summarized, makes it perhaps the most significant basis for conclusions about the resolution of The Wild Palms.

As Vickery notes, both Harry and the tall convict have been changed by their experiences, "but only Harry knows he has been changed."²² Both Harry and the convict, prior to their initiations, believe they have no choice in how they choose to live: the convict is bound by his restrictive code to the prison; Harry, by his indoctrination to materialistic values by his father and his society. The convict never realises he has a choice beyond fulfilling his duty to bring back the woman and the skiff. The rigidity of his belief is reflected in the comic statement "'Yonder's your boat, and here's the woman. But I never did find that bastard on the cottonhouse'" (278). The tall convict really believed part of his duty had not been fulfilled, and that that fact alone justifies his arrest and longer prison term. He could only bemoan his fate and wish his return to the prison because he does not profit by his experiences on the river, he does not allow himself to change. On the other hand, Harry, in his final introspection makes a significant choice: "Yes, he thought, between grief and nothing I will take grief" (324). Harry knows he has been changed by his experience. His understanding of Charlotte and the meaning of love is still far from complete, but he at last realises he has a choice: he can choose between a death-like

existence in which he, like the convict, chooses to blot out memory, or he can preserve life in memory, imagination. Harry, like the convict, is given a chance for freedom, a chance to be physically unrestrained. No one tries to tell the convict that he is free, no one gives him a reason why he should not go back to prison.

Harry, too, needs a reason why he should not go to prison. When Rat offers him money to escape (as Charlotte wished) Harry says: "Only if he had just told me why, Wilbourne thought. Maybe I would have.

Only he knew he would not have" (313). Harry, like the convict, is given a chance for death: Rat offers him cyanide (322). But Harry realises that there is no love in death, no complete relationship without "the old meat after all, no matter how old" (324). Whereas the convict submits himself to a death-in-life existence without meaning, Harry finds life in prison through memory and imagination. The final conclusion that must arise from the counterpoint of Harry and the tall convict is that they both begin in prison, both end in prison; both do the best they can, but only one succeeds in finding a degree of life in captivity, a degree of hope amidst the chaos of modern society.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Eliot, The Waste Land and Other Poems, 33, 34, 39.
- ²Most articles dealing with The Wild Palms, for example, either ignore the analogy between musical counterpoint, briefly include a reference or two about Faulkner's intent to use counterpoint, or fail to explore the analogy to its fullest potential.
- ³Huxley, Point Counter Point, 293-294.
- ⁴Brown, Music and Literature, 210.
- ⁵Jelliffe, ed., Faulkner at Nagano, 79-80.
- ⁶Gwynn and Blotner, Faulkner in the University, 178.
- ⁷Meriwether and Millgate, Lion in the Garden, 247-248.
- ⁸Faulkner, The Wild Palms, 119-120. All subsequent references to the text of The Wild Palms will be noted parenthetically in this thesis.
- ⁹Blom, ed., Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 464.
- ¹⁰Scholes, The Oxford Companion to Music, 260.
- ¹¹Brown, 39-40.
- ¹²Ibid., 43.
- ¹³Jewkes, "Counterpoint in Faulkner's The Wild Palms," 39-52.
- ¹⁴Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner, 156.
- ¹⁵Millgate, William Faulkner, 69.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 70.
- ¹⁷Backman, "Faulkner's The Wild Palms: Civilization Against Nature," 199.
- ¹⁸Ibid., 204.
- ¹⁹Adams, Faulkner: Myth and Motion, 7.
- ²⁰Ibid., 10-11.
- ²¹Brooks, William Faulkner, 257.
- ²²Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner, 165.

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